

JEVADHARA

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JESUS WITH THE PEOPLE

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THE MARCH HAS BEGUN

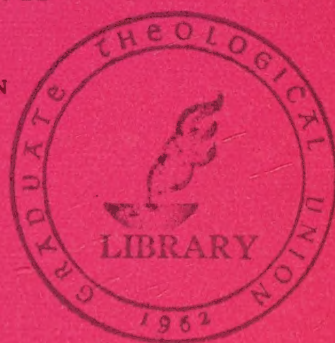
Samuel Rayan

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

C. M. Cherian

PEOPLE AS PROMISE

M. Amaladoss



PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS AND STRUGGLES IN INDIA

J. Chenakala

MAO AND THE PEOPLE

M. J. Joseph

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JEEVADHARA

The Living Christ

JESUS WITH THE PEOPLE

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Theology Centre
Kottayam - 686 017
Kerala, India

THEVADHARA
The Living Christ

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Editorial

This issue of Jeevadhara wants to bear witness to something rather new and refreshing. It wishes to point to signs of awakening among the masses of the common people. They are at last becoming aware of their resources, their possibilities and their power. They are recovering their own identity and rebuilding their pride. All around there is growing recognition of people's wisdom, the validity of their experience, their ability to innovate and to create, their capacity for understanding, discernment, organisation and collaboration. There are also new attempts on the part of the ruling classes to suppress the people. For the ruling elite are conscious of the decline and near disappearance of people's confidence in them.

All this is as it should be, and it is not without spiritual and theological significance. It is not only that the possibilities of people as God's image and as heirs to God's earth are beginning to be realized. It is also that God's design for the world is becoming history's dynamics in a new and newly hopeful way through the people. And that the awakening of the masses link up with the stir and swell of the crowds at the coming of Jesus and the newness of his words. The approach of Jesus to his mission was populist. What Jesus set afoot was a movement from below, fresh and vigorous with the unjaded vitality of the masses. And so it remained for over three hundred years. Then it was derailed; then it developed elitist classes within it; and the people were progressively margined as well as cut off from other people. But today the people are again on the move. *The March has Begun* is the title of the first article which provides a framework for the understanding and appreciation of the rest with reference to the living Christ.

The next two articles, both titled *The People of God*, mark the end of christian elitism, and present Humankind as God's Chosen People. God's Covenant is with all mankind. God has never withdrawn from the world or any part of it. Abraham is but an example of the many remarkably faithful individuals

found all over the world. The idea of Israel as a religious elite is radically criticised by the prophets, and rejected. No special privileges for Israel. And within Israel, it is the civil, political and religious leaders that led the people astray and are responsible for Israel's tragedy. (Just as for our tragedy today and the messy condition of our world, the responsibility rests with the elites and the leaders). Jesus confirms the radicalism of the prophets. What privilege do visible christian communities have if they are not faithful? And if others are faithful, what disprivilege do they suffer? The Church is not a privileged body but a sign-community. Being Church is a responsibility. Is the Christian Church the only Sign of salvation that God is offering the world? If sign is necessary or helpful, there must be more than one in God's history with humankind.

The next contribution, *The People Are the Promise*, proceeds to emphasise the creativity of the masses and the promise it contains for the future of our world. People's creativity is released and made operative through their liberation and development. "The new world cannot be the work of an elite... The masses must be liberated... Only they can change the world". There follows then a story of *People's Movements and Struggles in India*, a concrete instance of these, one of the many stirrings in the land, a sign of hope. The last piece, *Mao and the People*, echoes a significant voice rising from within the greatest of people's achievements within the recent memory of man. Mao pointed out to the West that "Of all things in the world, people are the most precious". Within that statement did he not reach out to and touch Jesus?

Jesus is with the people, lost in the crowds on the march. We join the march and hope to make him out and meet him someday.

Vidya Jyoti
Delhi

Samuel Rayan

The March has Begun

1. The people have stood up

There are signs of hope. There are movements among the people. As there were once among the very dry bones in the valley to which the Lord brought Ezekiel: "...and there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them... and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great host" (Ezekiel 37:1-14). The dumb masses are beginning to speak. Their voice is shattering the culture of silence in which they had been held for long. For long they had been kept divided and ruled, oppressed and made to lie low; dead. Now they are coming alive, joining together, and standing up. A mighty uprising, like an immense army, like a moving sea.

Kṛṣṇa said to Arjuna: "Uttiṣṭha. Arise. Prepare for action. Stand up..." Today the people are Arjuna. Their faint-heartedness is passing. They are finding their feet, and a footing on land (see Bhagavadgita, 2/3, 37; 4/42).

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China came into being. Mao Tse Tung said: "The chinese people, one quarter of humanity, have stood up. From now no one will insult us again".

Oh Jae Shik writes: "Asian history is suddenly marked by the coming of the people onto the central stage of history, determining their own destiny. The people of Asia have come of age".¹

1. Oh Jae Shik, The people come of Age, Christian Council of Asia-Urban Rural Mission (=CCA-URM) Project Report, 1972, Tokyo, included in *Towards a Theology of People, I*, (TTP) Tokyo, 1977, p. 52.

Something is happening to and among the people. A stirring from below, from within. Something of the Lord's doing, I believe. Something in which the prophets among us can feel proud to collaborate. Something which Jesus would love to see, grow and flourish, which he would gladly support and struggle to promote.

The people are beginning to see through conventional beliefs. One such belief is "that elites have the understanding and the power to lead humankind through the perils of our times". But the mess in which the masses find an elite-led world is revealing the bankruptcy of this myth. The elite have made an ugly world, unfit for life; they have killed too many people and destroyed too many human values; and their economics and politics are a total failure. The people are developing the ability to see through every elitist trick, and the conviction is growing among them that "the task of building the earth — at the global as well as at the local level — is the responsibility of us all", of the vast masses of the people.² All elitist claims to rule, to superiority and to privilege are under attack. The validity of elitist understanding of progress and standards of life and of elitist definitions of human needs and values is denied: People, waking up to their worth and dignity, to their rights and their endless possibilities, are rejecting the division of humankind into upper and lower classes. They are challenging the right of those to guide the world who are the authors of a system in which the power and affluence of the few can be secured and sustained only through organisation of wars, race in atomic weapons, promotion of conflicts, politics of lies, sale of armaments, practice of imprisonment and torture, legal and illegal murder and violence, induced scarcity, designed unemployment, production of poverty and maintenance of misery in order to assure a constant supply of cheap labor on the one hand and the creation of artificial needs to ensure consumer market on the other. Now the people are moving, against immense odds, to take their life and their world into their own hands, to build their own history, and be responsible for their own future. They

2. See Gerald and Patricia Mische, *Towards a Human World Order*, New York, 1977, pp. 360-361.

are shaking off their back all managers of life, secular no less than religious.

On the other hand, not all the elite are sure of their own superior achievement. Some of them are uncomfortable with the role they are playing. They are sensitive to the rumble beneath their feet, and see the people's movements as full of promise for the future of the earth. They are clear-sighted enough to confess that the stirrings from below lie closer to their own faith in God than a social order run by a privileged top class. They feel that something is happening which pulsates with the Mind of Jesus, and challenges elitism and hierarchism in church and in society.

2. The people and the elite

"People" may denote persons in general, men and women; or members of a family, clan, tribe; or a whole group or nation, the whole enfranchised and qualified citizens' body considered as the source of power. The word can also mean the common people, the mass of the community as distinct from the nobility, the ruling or official class, and the clergy. It is the sense that the word is used here. The "elite", then, are the nobility, the ruling and official class, that group in society which controls society's wealth and power and consequently enjoys privileges and appropriates the best available services and considers itself superior to the mass of the community.

technocracy

In India as also in the rest of Asia and elsewhere, the elite control the entire or the major and dominant sectors of society on the economic, political and cultural levels. In solving economic problems, in creating political processes and in ordering society, they systematically apply modern science and technology. This system of government has, therefore, come to be known as technocracy. Kim Yong Bock distinguishes three components in the Asian version of technocracy. These are political, military and economic, and all three are intertwined³. In most Asian

3. Kim Yong Bock and Pharis J. Harvey, *People Toiling under Pharaoh*, CCA-URM, Tokyo, 1976, p. 4.

societies there is no strong and purposeful political elite group; nor any economic power elite which could be described as modernizing. The result has been the emergence of the military as the decisive force. Asian politics have become largely militarised, and economic development proceeds (or recedes) under command of the generals. Technocracy has thus come to mean the organization of the military as the most efficient agency in control of national life. The search for efficiency gets interlocked with western military powers and with the Multinational Corporations (= MNCs) of the West which are the owners and controllers of technology and economics in the West. India does not quite answer this picture but comes very close to it; its economic elites lean heavily on their army and their police to terrorise and suppress the masses as in the case of the Naxalite movement, or of the Harijan and Tribal movements; the coming of their emergency was accompanied with enhancement of salaries of their officials and the gift of total licence to their police.

Feliciano Carino of the Philippines interpretes the philosophy of these military elite governments as follows. The basic problem of Asia is economic development and increase in output since the primary human right is the right to bread. But economic development on a sufficiently large scale is a difficult and complicated process. It calls for a high degree of technological expertise and specialised skill to predict the future, draw up plans and direct the process. And the process needs time to mature and bear fruit. In this period of gestation there must be stability. Now it is only the military that can secure political stability and industrial peace, command the necessary skills and co-ordinate all the factors and see the plan through. The people do not have knowledge enough, they are too emotional, and cannot therefore be taken into the mainstream of the process of planning and implementation. They are naturally marginal to the process. They must be silent spectators, they must wait, and work hard till the results appear and the controllers judge it time to let them become central as beneficiaries of the great programme. But the military and other elite in controll also know that they need outside support. They are unable to hide the fact of deep dependency of the national military on foreign

military powers, or the fatal dependence of national economy on the MNCs. The whole thing can collapse unless the foreign tycoons and war-managers are humoured with privileges and concessions at the expense of the people; unless foreign support is bought with high power and costly international public relations techniques; unless the people at home are pacified, and diverted through a string of prestige projects and sensational happenings or repressed brutally with military might.⁴

In any case, the military elite and their associates at home and abroad, the MNCs and their armed support in their own home bases are in control and reap the benefit of the toil and the sweat of the masses. "The giant western corporations, equipped with the most sophisticated technology and massive economic and financial resources, come to the Asian region and deal with the commanders of economic development, that is, the military-technocratic power elites. The military or technocratic political power groups in Asian nations eliminate all the budding and "feeble" democratic processes in the name of economic modernization, as the cost of economic growth. This is translated into massive political repression, rampant in Asia today. The present military or dictatorial regimes' action against the peoples is certainly an internalization of the Vietnam war dynamic in our Asian nations. Instead of military violence being aimed at an external enemy, it is directed against a nation's own people in the name of combatting communist subversion".⁵ The power of the MNCs is greater and more sophisticated than the governments and power groups they deal with. The MNCs professedly come to save Asia from poverty and hunger. In reality, however, they bring "enormous structural economic distortion and dependence, and even economic violence against the workers, consumers and peasants". And they work in collusion with local ruling class in various ways.

and the people?

They are left out and silenced. They become objects of technocracy and victims of its violence. In colonial times the

4. Feliciano Carino; from a talk given in Sri Lanka, January 1979.

5. Kim Yong Bock, op. cit. p. 4.

west served as corrosive agents of Asian civilizations, doing its work through religion, technology and commercial-political might. Today the corrosion is being carried further through structural domination by the Corporations as well as cultural domination by the local elite and the colonial educational system which they support. The people's economic life is being exploited, marginalised and underdeveloped. Their language and culture are uprooted and destroyed. Agriculture is commercialized, peasant economy is made an appendix to industrial economy, labor force is tightly controlled and reduced to a functional element with wages kept inhumanly low, and working conditions, sub-human. During the twenty-month Emergency in India, one of the many posters on walls and buses read, "Work more, talk less". Beasts of burden work much and talk not at all. Reduction of the Indian people to that condition was being attempted after setting aside parliamentary procedures, that is, Government by Talking Together, Government by Discussion. The MNCs and allied technocratic political elites have proved themselves profoundly corruption-prone. It is clear that "corruption is only a by-product of the structural collusion of power between the "technocratic" power elites and the technocratic economic power of MNCs , a demonic symbiosis of power develops that will ultimately seek to destroy the people as the enemy of technocracy, as long as they refuse to be the object of technocracy, and struggle to be the subjects of their history"⁶. One of the most dangerous, even fatal, features of this power-collusion, of which the people must take immediate and serious note, is the export of pollution from rich countries to poorer countries. The economic, political and military elites in our countries have become so dependent on foreign industrial and military giants that our power regimes "have to accept the highly polluting industries without raising any questions"⁷. In such a situation democracy is considered a luxury; dictatorships are given a historical mission to modernize economics; and the people are politically brushed aside and socially oppressed, "The political regime builds very thick institutional walls on all levels, legal, political, social and economic, so that

6. Kim Yong Bock, *op. cit.* p. 9.

7. Kim Yong Bock, *op. cit.* p. 10.

the people do not have any meaningful access to the "rapidly growing and industrializing economy", and the people are told that they should wait until they are needed as workers or as consumers, in other words, as appendages to the economic system"⁸.

Thus the bulk of the people are everywhere in bondage⁹. They have known oppression from colonial, neo-colonial and national ruling power. The power of making decisions continually flows away from local grass-roots to the elites who control the complicated apparatus of national and international competition in armaments, capital and scarce resources. And competition undercuts many human values like truth, justice and freedom which are central to the people's understanding of themselves and of life. Competition consolidates or engenders ethnocentrism, secrecy and ruthlessness¹⁰. This is true of both the super-powers, and proportionately of others. Between them there is little or no fundamental ideological difference; in both a new privileged class has emerged who make decisions that profoundly determine the life of the people. Both have their masses locked out of the decision-making process. In both people's participation has been minimised and is on the decrease. "...U. S. voters have increasingly less voice in the national decisions that profoundly affect their personal lives. It really makes little difference whom they elect... "The people" in whose name the American Revolution and the Soviet Revolution were both made, end up as the powerless in both cases." The elite world suffers from a tendency to lower and denigrate the "average" citizens' input to the making of history and to the wisdom of life. An important reason for this marginalisation of people is the fact that most existing governments "are not truly representative of the people they govern and are ill-equipped or (ill-) disposed to represent the best interests of all their own citizens"¹¹.

The situation is best described as an internalisation of war: the technocratic elite in command of weapons and money,

8. Kim Yong Bock, op. cit. p. 8.

9. M. M. Thomas, Christian Action in the Asian Struggle, in TTP, p. 9.

10. Gerald and Patricia Mische, op. cit. pp. 55-60.

11. Ibid., pp. 165-167, 274, 244.

waging a war against the people. The people's land and life are under occupation by hostile forces; as was the case in Paris and in Manila 1943. That is why so many regimes are so secretive, repressive, and addicted to ever-mounting military budgeting. That is why they are so incapable of attending to simple and obvious human needs like bread and work and clean water and clean air, and a small home and a minimum of education and dignity for all men and women in every land. Such needs are the test of technocracy; they are also the measure of its failure and of its aberration. The Indian educational system, for instance, commands at the tertiary level enormous funds, creating endless institutions and opportunities for the benefit of the elites, while the primary level lies neglected; and minimal literacy after 32 years of political freedom is a shameless, shameful, 30 per cent, elitist statistics! The case of education is mentioned only as symbol and simple of our entire system. One could mention other symbols like our Four and Five Star Hotels, or the large and beautiful homes with extensive grounds and gardens of the ruling classes side by side with the squalid slums and drains and sidewalks where other "citizens of India" live generation after generation, and eke out a worm's existence. The elites, while quarrelling among themselves over division of booty even to the point of emergency rule and police-and-prison politics, will avoid touching basic issues like land-reform or national education or organisation of internal market or keeping the MNCs out. The best among them show a chronic tendency to be apparently middle-of-the-road and non-committed. They are always careful, the church people among them in particular, never to yield 'to any radical impulse'¹².

a story

Told by Masao Takenaka: "Four women workers were discharged by the management of one of the largest textile factories in Seoul. These girls had expressed their desire to improve the labor conditions and have chapel attendance made non-compulsory. The factory owner is an elder of one of the largest churches in Seoul, and many of the managers hold im-

12. Edicio de la Torre, *Christian Participation in the Struggle for Liberation*, in TTP, p. 84.

portant posts in christian churches. In the factory, chapel services have been conducted by a chaplain hired by management. There such virtues as diligence, obedience and patience have been encouraged, in order to increase incentive — without considering the exploitative working conditions and the right to religious liberty.

“The four girls who were discharged and their friends appealed to the churches, thinking that some might respond to rescue their situation. Yet the institutional churches did not take the time to listen to the crying need of these women workers. They were too pre-occupied with the programme of Billy Graham’s mass meeting. The institutional churches were eager to hear the message of the great evangelist from the United States, but were not quite open to listen to the small voice of the alienated workers in their own country. Their whole attention was concentrated upon the success of the mass evangelistic meeting, in which the star preacher was the centre of attraction”¹³.

Billy Graham’s meeting, held on June 3, 1973, was attended by 1.1 million people. It bore testimony to the rare organisational potential of Korean Christians. There were 2800 ushers, 15,000 counsellors, 6,800 people to collect the offering, and 100,000 men and women in the choir. The offerings totalled about 21,340 US Dollars. It was a time when, after revision of the constitutions to make possible an extension of Park’s term of office and after introduction and lifting of martial law, the government was still repressive and keeping tight control over every sphere of life. Under these circumstances the meeting was a fine witness to christian belief that our ultimate loyalty is to God and to nobody else. But also it is clear that under such conditions the meeting could not have taken place without the understanding and support of the government.

Points to ponder: elite preaching to christian masses organised by church elites with the approbation and support of the ruling elite; factory owned and managed by economic and social elites, providing elite devotions and promoting elitist

13. Takenaka, M., *Mission in Metropolis*, in TTP, p. 164.

(economically profitable, politically domesticating and humanly neutralising) virtues; four working-class girls, representing the the "people", deprived of their rights, their work and their livelihood (why?), refused a hearing by church people (why?), and neglected. A clear example of the class character of socio-economic, political and religious reality. What would Jesus do? stand with the girls? or be busy as an organiser of Billy Graham's preach-meet? or eventually apply for post of chaplain in the factory of that churchy elder? or...?

What is the way out for the people? Where does hope lie for the masses? The vital question is not economic development, which surely is necessary. Nor is it distribution of the benefits of development; justice calls for that. Nor is the question one of chaplaincy and services; these can be real distortions. The vital question concerns the politics of economic development, and the underlying ideology of programmes and services. The question is, Who controls the entire process of production and distribution and who makes the major decisions?

3. The people renew their strength

"Let the people renew their strength".

"Awake, awake! To your feet, Jerusalem! Awake! Clothe yourself with strength, Zion."

"Arise, shine out", and "Depart from Babylon!" ... (Isaiah 41:1; 51:9, 17; 52:1; 60:1).

It is the people, the mass of the human community in each place and across the earth that can give ground for hope. Only they can provide perspectives for search for a new future, and put on strength for the necessary struggle. The basis of hope is the people's own awakening, their disillusionment with the elite who have tricked them and let them down on every side and their nascent confidence in themselves. All who want a new world order will have to put their faith in the people and in their possibilities, without of course making the people a Messiah, but without also minimising and devaluing the limitless potential the people have for innovation, sanity and celebration, for a leap forward and for love.

*The peasant movement goes on in the Philippines. "...working in the open or underground, co-operating partially with government, working to topple it down, assisted by non-peasant groups or on their own ... the peasant movement goes on ... The people's wisdom which is inexhaustible and their cleverness which develops with the times assure the peasant movement of inevitable victory. The peasants sooner than later will yet rule themselves and manage their own affairs — and be free to develop not only themselves but the whole country. The Spirit moves among them and the poor are preaching the Good News to themselves"*¹⁴.

*"The will of the people of Vietnam in their struggle against the most powerful army and sophisticated technology of the strongest nation in the world, testifies to the power of the people"*¹⁵. The story and the outcome of the Vietnam war, the desperation of the U. S. military men, their panicky bombing of everything and their ignominious defeat cannot be understood apart from the moral courage and spiritual tenacity of the popular masses. After Ho Chi-Minh's victory over the French in Dien Bien Phu and after the Geneva conference, 1954, the proposed all-Vietnam election were wrecked by joint American-French manipulations because American intelligence had come to learn that 85 per cent of the South Vietnam people would vote Ho. It is that 85 per cent and more that sheltered, fed and supported the guerilla movement for some thirty years in villages and in cities; that proved disastrous to U. S. war elites. The Dien Bien Phu battle itself was won because "thousands of (Vietnamese) men, women and even children forming the supply units walked along the jungle tracks at night with their loads on poles, minute oil lamps furnishing the pin points of light that enabled them to follow each other in unending human chains"¹⁶.

14. Charles R. Avila, *Peasant Theology, Reflections by Filipino Peasants on their Process of Social Revolution*, Bangkok, 1976, p. 71.

15. Oh Jae Shik, art. cit., in TTP p. 52.

16. Charles Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh*, New York, 1973, pp. 110-111.

The lessons of the Chinese revolution is still vivid in Asian minds: it was the *victory of the people*. People's revolutions won the day in Mozambique, in Angola, in Guinea Bisseau, in Cuba. We are confident, or rather, the people of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa are confident of overthrowing elitist oppression, some day. So are all the numberless oppressed millions of Asia. "The people are claiming their right to be subjects of history; they are refusing to be passive objects. They are recognizing their own strength and ability to shape a new society. The historical reality can be concretely witnessed to in movements of people in factories, cities and rural areas"¹⁷. In Mao's view, "the people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history"¹⁸. "The masses are the real heroes while we ourselves are often childish and ignorant, and without this understanding it is impossible to acquire even the most rudimentary knowledge"¹⁹.

Mahatma Gandhi strongly advocated the development of *people's power* as the only safeguard of justice in any political system; as the only way in which ideas and structures of democracy could be given reality and substance. M. M. Thomas has observed that without Janaśakti or people's power, developed through mass struggles, parliamentary democracy only buttresses the established power structure²⁰. People's power comes from *people's organization* through which people enable themselves to define issues and choose the strategies required to change society's structures which affect their social, economic and political rights and welfare. Organizing of people for their rights has priority over everything else.

People emerging as subjects of their own history are discovering that the language they actually use is not their own.

17. Oh Jae Shik, art. cit., op. cit. p. 52.

18. Mao Tse-Tung, On Coalition Government, 1945. in *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (QCM) Tse-Tung, Peking 1974, p. 118.

19. Mao, Preface and Postscript to Rural Surveys, 1941, in QCM, p. 118.

20. M. M. Thomas, art. cit., TTP, p. 13.

Their own language, born of their group experience of oppression and suffering, and carrying their hopes and aspirations, has been muted and disallowed. The words allowed and imposed are the words of the ruling class, which mediate the interests, values and ideology of the ruling class. In refusing to accept the ideology of the elites, the people are also declining ruling class language and the alienation and servitude it brings. They will, of course, continue to work hard, but they will also talk more, talk louder if need be, make demands, make their voice heard, find their words, and tell *their stories*. "Story-telling is one of the most ingenious ways in which the power and wisdom of the people out of their experiences emerges."²¹

The people must burnish and perfect their own methods and process of *self-education* in order to express effectively the core of their historical experience, and to guard against the subtle pressures by which the elite continually seek to seduce and annex people's minds. Among those helping to achieve this are Ivan Illich, Everett Reimer, Martin Carnoy, Paolo Freire and others. The language of the powerful is critically analysed and demythologised. The cultural and emotional content of words is discovered and weighed, then rejected or re-lived at a more widely and deeply conscious levels of personal and collective commitment. *People's education* is not busy with the fantasies of the rich or with eternal essences, but with their own historical reality, with the causes and consequences of their poverty and unfreedom and with the withering away of their hopes and of their children. Its purpose is to grasp truth in its historical concreteness, and through truth, concrete and dynamic, to challenge and transform the world so that the Human in everyone may have a chance of self-realization.

The elimination of the elite will redeem the elite themselves by a re-insertion of their meagre humanity into the rich sub-soil of mass life. *The artistic and creative wealth of the people* is becoming active and gaining recognition despite long-standing prejudices nursed and spread by the elite. Bernard Rudofsky shows how architectural history, for instance, has been

21. Kim Yong Bock, op. cit., p. 12.

biased on the social plane. Architectural history as we know it "amounts to little more than a who's who of architects who commemorated power and wealth; an anthology of buildings of, by, and for the privileged - the house of true and false gods, of merchant princes and princes of the blood - with never a word about the houses of lesser people. Such pre-occupation with noble architecture and architectural nobility to the exclusion of all other kinds may have been understandable as late as a generation ago...."²² Rudofsky's exhibition-book, *Architecture Without Architects*, is an attempt "to break down our narrow concept of the art of building by introducing the unfamiliar world of non-pedigreed architecture. It is so little known that we don't even have a name for it. For want of a generic label we shall call it vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, rural as the case may be." By concentrating on rich men's architects and on their wealthy patrons, the historian "has obscured the talents and achievements of the anonymous builders, men whose concepts sometimes verge on the utopian, whose aesthetics approach the sublime. The beauty of this architecture has been dismissed as accidental but today we should be able to recognise it as the result of rare good sense in the handling of practical problems. The shapes of the houses, sometimes transmitted through a hundred generations, seem eternally valid, like those of their tools". Rudofsky's exhibition and book are admittedly polemical; he is comparing "the serenity of the architecture in so-called underdeveloped countries with the architectural blight in industrial countries". In orthodox history, the emphasis is on the work of individual architects; "here the accent is on communal enterprise". *Communal architecture* has been defined as "a communal art, not produced by a few intellectuals or specialists but by the spontaneous and continuing activity of a whole people with a common heritage, acting under a community of experience".²³ All that is a new revelation of the greatness and wonder of the people. The people together and as a community have the capacity to be architect of a new social order and builders of a new world, at once beautiful and practical, sub-

22. Rudofsky, Bernard, *Architecture Without Architects.*, New York, 1964, preface.

23. Rudofsky, B, op. cit, preface.

lime and effective, human and serene like the homes they have built for themselves all over the world throughout the centuries.

Refreshing perspectives, these. Equally refreshing is the following story written for me by one of the characters of the piece. "This is about *what common people can do*. The Behavioural Science Centre of St. Xavier's College, Ahmedbad, has been conducting Non-Formal Education Programmes. The Ahmedbad TV got interested and wanted to telecast a programme among its documentaries. A well-known playwright wrote the script, a group of the best actors performed. But the thing did not seem to click; it was not ringing through. Two college students who had personal experience of the injustices of the caste system tried to re-write the script, but with no better results. It was then suggested that the group proceed to Pandad, a village of Bhal near Cambay, and ask the villagers, all victims of social injustice, to act out a skit. They were given a general idea of what we were looking for but not any formal dialogue. When the villagers' performance was over, the director regretted he had not filmed it at the first instance. "I wonder if these people will do that well again". But they did. And in fact, even better. A group of trainees from a nearby village went to the TV centre to see the show, and we were there observing their reactions. We could feel their emotions rise, we could see the clenched fists and hear words like, "If our youngsters can do this, we too can". Their confidence was building up. The hidden source of the power of the masses was being tapped".²⁴

Mao called on every comrade to "believe in the *inexhaustible creative power of the masses*". "The masses have boundless creative power. They can organize themselves and concentrate on places and branches of work where they can give full play to their energy".²⁵ Part of Mao's faith is that the masses have "potentially inexhaustible enthusiasm for socialism". He has always maintained that the revolution must rely on the masses of the people, and on everybody taking a hand rather than in a few persons issuing orders. Some comrades, he complained, do

24. Francis Parmar, private notes.

25. Mao, Introductory note to 'Surplus Labor has Found a Way Out', 1945 in QCM, 118f.

not understand why or how to give play to the initiative and creative energy of these they lead.²⁶

The *people are the inspiration* of poets and political thinkers. Kim Chi Ha, catholic, political prisoner and poet, has made his voice heard from where he is detained in solitary confinement for opposing South Korea's dictator Park's violations of human rights. In his "*Declaration of Conscience*", which he smuggled out of prison, he confesses that the main source of his thought is his personal involvement in the life of the people in the rural areas.

"My thoughts stem from the love and confidence of the people. I myself was born and brought up as a part of the people....The oppressors are saying that people are not respectable, are ugly and dirty in appearance, corrupted morally and by nature idle, ignorant and apathetic. In short, they say, the people are inferior. To the contrary, the people I encounter are not such people. They are diligent, hard-working, and quite honest. They look ignorant yet they possess the potential of abundant wisdom....they internally maintain strong will and power....they have warm compassion for the affairs of their neighbours. The *people have human dignity and boiling energy within themselves.*"²⁷

Han Suyin, analysing the dynamics of China's Great Leap Forward (1957-1960), shows how *decision-making power* was wrested from the hands of a new managerial technocratic elites and placed in the hands of a worker-peasant alliance, how the barrier between mental and manual labor was partly dissolved when workers too learned philosophy and lectured in the universities, and peasants made scientific experiments. "Thousands of articles written by workers and peasants came out in the press. Never had this been seen in China before. Poetry too.

26. Mao, Introductory Note to 'This Township Went cooperative in Two Years', QCM p. 121; A Talk to the Editorial Staff of the Shansi-Suiyuan Daily, 1948, QCM p. 122-3.

27. Kim Chi Ha, Declaration of Conscience, Sekai, The World, sept. 1975, pp. 48-49.

Ignored by the officials of Culture and Propaganda, peasant and worker poetry came out in wall posters, in local news papers, by the million in factories and communes. The Chinese peasant has always had a propensity for the rhymed couplet. Revolutionary fervour, like love, stimulated memorable phrases which have remained part of the new language of defiance, daring and hope".²⁸

Even in such areas as *health-care and medicine*, jealously guarded in "modern" societies as specialists' fortresses, are actually in need of people's wisdom and sanity, and must be opened up before the specialists place our health in complete jeopardy and hold every man to ransom. The colonialist policy was to marginalise local medicine and health-care traditions; and to colonial-educate a new elite to share in the overlord's contempt of what was "native" and adoration of what would bring him profit. With the growth of these attitudes health-hazards have grown too, and health-care and medicine have become too costly to be accessible to the masses. But the people are reversing these trends, and struggling to win control of their health and life which has been wrested from them. For instance the Accupuncture in China and the Ayurveda and Siddha systems in India are being restored to their due place. But Ivan Illich takes a further step in pointing out the political dimensions of limiting professional health-care. In whose interest will these limited work? That depends largely "on who takes the initiative in formulating the need for them: *people organised for political action* that challenges status-quo professional power, or the health profession intent on expanding their monopoly even further".²⁹ Illich's own argument is that "*the layman and not the physician* has the potential perspective and effective power to stop the current iatrogenic epidemic" (= originating from physicians). The task of limiting medicine, a task vital to health, cannot be left to professionals. Professional power, and autonomous authority granted by university educated bourgeois over people's health, "can only be delegitimised by popular agreement

28. Han Suyin, *Wind in the Tower, Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Revolution*, Suffolk, 1976/78, pp. 162-163.

29. Illich, I, *Limits to Medicine*, Delhi 1977, pp. 3-4.

about the malignancy of this power".³⁰ Have not the Black Panther and the Red Guard manifestos demanded that "control over health be returned to the people?"³¹ People in the Indian villages know 'how to deal with death, dying and grief'. Then the doctor and the nurse arrive, they think they know better. "Instead of modernizing people's skills for self-care, they preach the ideal of hospital death. By their ministration they urge the peasants to an unending search for the good death of international description, a search that will keep them consumers for ever".³² There are four fundamental principles on which the approach to medical care in China is based. They are described by Dr. Ma Hai-teh (former Dr. George Hatem, Lebanese American turned Chinese communist) as follows: 'Serving the workers, soldiers and peasants; emphasising prevention; integrating and unifying traditional Chinese medicine with modern medicine; and cultivating a *mass approach* to health work and method'.³³ Medically sponsored behaviour and delusions should not be allowed "to restrict the autonomy of people by undermining their competence in growing up, caring for each other, and aging, or when medical intervention cripples personal responses to pain, disability, impairment, anguish and death". Illich's welcome conclusion is that "the level of public health corresponds to the degree to which the means and responsibility for coping with illness are distributed among the total population".³⁴

In this matter as in all else, the *planning has to be from below*, from the midst of the people, and by them. In Chinese economy the planning from below introduced by Mao was a departure from the bureaucratic ways of orthodox socialist planning. Wilfred Burchett reports being told that the decisions on new strains of seed, or new types of fertilizers and the like as on all other matters rests with the general meeting of the

30. Illich, I, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

31. Illich, I, op. cit. p. 156.

32. Illich, I, op. cit., pp. 204-205.

33. Burchett, W. with Alcey, R., *China: the Quality of Life*, Renguin 1976, p. 232.

34. Illich, I., op. cit., p. 274.

members at commune, brigade or team level. "We have no hope of fully meeting the increasing needs of the country for our products, but we must find means to bring into full play the enthusiasm and initiatives of the plant personnel." Why was there no trade-union committee at Heilungkiang in 1973? "Because like everything else in China, (replied Peng Hang-shen), the trade-union movement must be built up from the bottom up."³⁵ Where the planning is from the top, 'the people are shaped to the mould of officials' and accommodated into the ready-made socio-economic programmes. Then plans are for the people, not of or by them; and the official levels that make them often team up with big money and these work together beautifully for their own mutual benefit.³⁶

Theology too is struggling to get free of the elitist hold and to grow from below, out of the people's experience of extensive suffering, out of their undying struggling hope, out of their faith-reflection on these in their own language. Already we have from the Philippines *Peasant Theology*, from Nicaragua *The Gospel in Solentiname*, and *Towards a Theology of People* which focusses voices from all over east and south Asia. And there is the theology of liberation from Latin America, Peasant Theology is "Reflections by Filipino Peasants on their process of Social Revolution". Here peasants are doing their own theologizing and raising disturbing theological questions like What is just and what is God's will with regard to the land? Whose is the land really? Why should a few lords who do not till the land own most of it and reap the fruit of our labour? The peasants discuss land and leadership, class and hunger, the government of the mighty and the church's impartiality, and the Good Samaritan story and Matthew 25 and the meaning of the Ascension of Jesus. Meanwhile in Solentiname, Sunday after Sunday, the *campesinos*, the rural people, farm workers and fisher folk, give expression to their own understanding of the Gospel as they hear it in the concrete context of their privation and fight for

35. Burchett, W., with Alley, R., op. cit., pp. 191, 198-199, 203.

36. Alan Saw U, *Christian Mission Within the Socialist System*, in TTP, p. 76.

life. They talk of love, of revolution, of the perfect society of the future, of unity, of conflict, and always of Jesus. Ernesto Cardenal finds the commentaries of the campesinos to be "of greater profundity than that of many theologians, but of a simplicity like that of the Gospel itself".³⁷ The volume *Towards a Theology of People* carries selections from the numerous songs, poems, diaries, reports, essays and art works in many languages and styles coming out of basic experience of christian witness in the midst of the downtrodden peoples of Asia. They come from action groups and people related to action groups. The locus of liberation theology is, according to Gustavo Gutierrez, "*the common people seeking to be agents of their own history and expressing their faith and hope in the poor Christ through their efforts for liberation*". It was out of populist movements that liberation theology has sprung up, it could not have sprung up but for these movements. Gutierrez observes that "throughout history we can detect a theology born out of the struggle of the poor, and suppressed or subverted by those in power". Where the poor and the masses are not *the subject of theology*, theology degenerates into an academic exercise. If theology is a matter of understanding our faith in God and its bearing on our contemporary life-experience, theology cannot belong exclusively nor primarily to the domain of professionals and library experts³⁸.

The chief source of theology, the chief 'record' of God's self-revelation and intervention in world history is people. It is people therefore that we should attend to in the first place, and explore and study and interpret by being with one another in reverence and love with a mutual service of freedom. "Theological thinking is truly theological when it deals with the historical transformation of the structures of dehumanisation and

37. Cardenal, E., *The Gospel in Solentiname*, New York, 1976, p. vii.

38. Gutierrez G., Two Theological Perspectives: Liberation Theology and Progressive Theology, in *The Emergent Gospel*, Orbis Books, New York, 1976, pp. 240, 242, and 248; also Carvajal, O. P., *The Context of Theology*, *ibid.*, p. 99.

injustice”³⁹. The movement of Third World Theologians has laid emphasis on the authenticity of theology as based on the involvement of rice-roots people in the struggle for their own liberation. The Dar es Salaam statement, 1976, underlines the theologian’s commitment to life of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, and his involvement in action with them⁴⁰. The Accra statement, 1977, of African theologians affirms “a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people”; a source of which will be the people’s struggles against racism, sexism and other forms of oppression and the search to shape a new future⁴¹. The Asian Theological Conference statement, Sri Lanka, 1979, has a whole paragraph on the subject of theology. “The first act of theology, its very heart, is commitment .. To be truly liberating this *theology must arise from the Asian poor* with a liberated consciousness. It is articulated and expressed by the oppressed community ... Hence a truly liberating theology must ultimately be the work of the Asian poor who are struggling for full humanity”⁴².

Something, then, is happening around the world and all over Asia. The search for a human world is on, and action for a new social order is afoot. It is happening among the oppressed masses of the people. Only they can fashion the new reality. Only in their values and experiences can it have safe grounding. An authentic revolution will be created only by its subjects; it cannot be created for them by someone else. The new world will not shape up if it is not the will and the work of the people. The empowerment and participation of the people is both the goal of the new world order and the way to it. That is why the imaging of the future, human world cannot be left to the intellectual and political elite. It has to be a people’s world born of their grass-roots experience, their practical

39. Towards a New Pilgrimage, Minutes of the sixth CCA-URM Committee meeting, 1974.

40. See The Emergent Gospel, p. 270.

41. See Kofi Appiah-Kubi, and Sergio Torres, eds., *African Theology en Route*, New York 1977, p. 193.

42. See statement of Asian Theological Conference, Sri Lanka, 1979.

wisdom and their natural understanding of human relationships⁴³. Hence the necessity to initiate “a revolution in thinking as well as in action among the inarticulate masses in the rural sector — the peasantry, the artisans, and the landless laborers as well as among the working sections of the urban communities⁴⁴. People’s participation and people’s power are the only safeguard against elitist deviation. That is a lesson of history we can’t afford to forget. The voices we have listened to and the signs we have seen tell us that the people’s march has begun.

4. Jesus with the people

These new stirrings and realizations rejoin something Jesus loved and set afoot. And maybe, Jesus himself goes out to meet them and is in them. It is there he will have to be recognized and met and offered collaboration. When we met Jesus for the first time, he was part of a crowd. He was lost in a multitude of people come from many parts of the land to confess their sins and get baptised by John (Lk 3: 7-22). Jesus loved to be with the masses, solidary, unlike the Jewish authorities who came only to pose questions and not to hear and to heed and to commit themselves in baptism (see Mk 11: 27-33; Lk 7: 29-30; Mt 21: 31-32). Jesus’ first public utterance was a further act of solidarity with the masses, this time not just with penitent sinners, but with the downtrodden and the deprived multitudes. To their liberation, healing and uplifting he is from that moment committed (Lk 4: 18; see Mt 11: 1-4). Significantly, he starts his work from below; from below he initiates his movement by gathering his closest co-workers from among working class people and fisherfolk. He has trust in the people at the bottom of the social ladder. Were his insights so modern? or are we trying to be modern by following in his steps? or is it that this is how anyone with a sense of history and respect for reality would act? The temptation narrative presents Jesus as a man who throughout his life scorned to grab power for himself or to grasp at opportunities to dazzle and dominate the multitudes. I guess that in his view power was not for hoarding

43. Gerald and Patricia Mische, *op. cit.*, pp. 244, 272-274.

44. CCA assembly, Bangkok, 1998, quoted by M. M. Thomas in TTP, p. 9.

at one or a few points; power was for the people; it was, like bread, for sharing. And I guess that he knew that the people would have to wrestle with satanic forces to dehoard power and bread and make these available to the masses.

Jesus was particular about moving among the masses and extending his personal experience and firsthand knowledge of their sorrows and struggles and the oppressive conditions of their life. So he went all over Galilee, teaching, healing and caring for the afflicted and the disabled (Mt 4/23-25). We see him later continuing his journeys, going around visiting all the towns and villages of his land. And what he saw filled his heart with pity. He found the crowds harassed and worried, exhausted and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, like an ungathered, uncared for and neglected harvest (Mt 9:35-38; Jn 10:1-18; Ezk 34). The metaphors from the people's life, a pastoral and a peasant metaphor, to describe the exploited and oppressed condition of the masses. Elsewhere Jesus describes them as a toiling multitude made to bear in addition heavy burdens (Mt 11/28; see 15/1-9; 23/4). It is part of his solidarity with the people that he takes his parables and metaphors and illustrations from what is familiar to them, from their daily life, their occupations, their sorrows and celebrations, and the surrounding nature to which they are so close, but rarely from past history, even from that part of it which the unlearned too knew. And he spoke the people's language, and he spoke to them, never the language of abstraction and mystification.

Not only does Jesus go out to be with the crowds, but at times he calls them to himself to instruct them, to invite them to freedom and the strength needed therefore. "Come to me all who are tired from carrying your heavy loads, and I will give you rest." "Then Jesus called the crowds to him once more and said to them, Listen to me, all of you. There is nothing that goes into a person from the outside which can make him unclean. (in saying this he declared that all foods are fit to be eaten)" (Mt 11:38; Mk 7:14-23; Mt 15:10-11). In this, and in declaring the sabbath to be for man, and in declaring that fast could not be central to the new order of things, Jesus was acting on behalf of the masses, setting aside religious rules and social traditions and their interpretations which had been elaborated

by the elite but which were impracticable and burdensome to the multitudes, which only served to make the masses feel guilty and be considered sinners and outcast. He insisted that the poorer classes who did not come up to elitist standards of holiness were God's special concern and were indeed more receptive of the gift of God's Reign. He had himself come to seek the outcast and not the respectable people. "And the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you." And children are welcome, as also those whom children represent, the unlearned masses, those without erudition and worldly wisdom. It is to such that the Father's revelation comes (Mt 11:25-30; 23:1-28; 21:28-32; Lk 7:36-50; Mk 2:17). Jesus replaces all heavy loads and external laws by the light load and easy yoke of love which springs from within, by which the heart is not oppressed, for which the heart is made, through which we grow and become truly, fully, ourselves, and which is within the capacity of all men and women.

But Jesus calls the crowds together also to challenge them with the demands of the Reign of God, with the demands of the life and structures of Love. "Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him and told them they should forget themselves, carry their cross, lose their life for his sake and the Gospel if they wanted to follow him at all (Mk 8: 34-38). Precisely because he loves the crowd and sees their possibilities and holds them in esteem, he would not worship them, would not spare them but liberate them through criticism of their self-seeking, their prejudices and their narrow visions. He would liberate them by summoning them to surpass themselves. Even while ministering to their need for health and food, Jesus was concerned with awakening in them a sense of their own worth and their freedom; and concerned with leading them to the deeper meaning of their experiences. For Jesus it was not enough that the people could eat their fill when they were hungry. That was important, but it was important too that they should experience the shared bread as Sign and proceed to the discovery of its Significance (John 6: 26). Meanwhile the crowd, willing in big measures and in small, to hear the word of God and to heed it, was declared to be closer to Jesus than his own relatives. Who indeed is Jesus' mother, sister and brother? (Mk 3: 31-35; see Jn 7: 1-9).

Jesus also knew how to withdraw both for the crowd's sake and his own. He knew how to leave the people to themselves that they might sort out ways of responding to the new challenge and the new opportunity which he had placed before them. His involvement with the masses on the bank of Jordan is followed by retirement to the desert (Lk. 4: 1-13). Days of service of people seem to alternate with nights or morning hours of withdrawal for prayer. Once Jesus left the crowds and went indoors, once he left the house long before daylight and went outdoors, out of town to a lonely place (Mt 13: 36; Mk 1: 35). After the feeding of the large crowd, Jesus sends the people away and then goes up a hill by himself to pray (Mt 14: 22-23; Mk 6: 45-46; Jn 6: 16). And finally he disappears in the clouds, leaving us to fight our own battles, and mine our own resources in the power of the Spirit he has poured out upon the masses from the high point of his own effective conflict with anti-human forces (Acts 1: 6-11; 2: 17-18; Jn 19: 34; 7: 37-39; 20: 22).

The crowds returned Jesus' devotion and interest. They came seeking his healing and his teaching. They followed him, thronged him, sought to see him, tried to touch him; and measures had to be taken at times to prevent them from crushing him.

"When evening came, ..people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had demons. All the people of the town gathered in front of the house..." (Mk 1: 32-33).

"A few days later Jesus came to Capernaum...So many people came together that there wasn't any room left, not even out in front of the door..." (Mk 2: 1-4).

"Jesus went back again to the shore of the Lake of Galilee. A crowd came to him and he started teaching them... Later he was having a meal in Levi's house. A large number of tax collectors and outcasts was following Jesus..." (Mk 2: 13, 15).

"Jesus and his disciples went away to Lake Galilee, and a large crowd followed him... This large crowd came to Jesus because they heard of the things he was doing. The crowd was

so large that Jesus told his disciples to get a boat ready for him, so the people would not crush him..." (Mk 3: 7-9).

"Again Jesus began to teach by Lake Galilee. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it. ..." (Mk 4: 1).

"Then Jesus went home. Again such a large crowd gathered that Jesus and his disciples had no time to eat..." (Mk 3: 20).

Jesus turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes"? His disciples answered, "You see how the people are crowding you, why do you ask, who touched you?" (Mk 5: 30-31).

"There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his disciples didn't even have time to eat. So he said to them, let us go off by ourselves to some place where we will be alone... Many people however saw them leave and knew at once who they were; so they went from all the towns and ran ahead by land and got to the place ahead of Jesus and his disciples. When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw this large crowd, and his heart was filled with pity for them (Mk 6: 31-34).

And so the Gospel narratives go on. Crowds run to meet Jesus, they run ahead of him, they accompany him. They harass him, admire his words and deeds, are astonished, are afraid. They debate about Jesus and many believe and some do not believe (Jn 7: 12, 43; Lk 9: 18; Mt 21: 1-11; 9: 8; 7: 28). They are with him everywhere, in the home, on the way upon the hills, in lonely and desert places, at the lakeside; in Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem and Samaria. We get the impression of an enthused crowd, of hopes sparked, of a mass movement, is stirring from below, with leadership beginning to form from the bottom up; impressions of a movement in which the harassed and exploited sheep, all the oppressed and marginalised masses find themselves affirmed and given hope of a future; one in which the leper, the crippled, the deprived, the prostitute, the outcast and "the people of the land" as well as the rich who are willing to opt out of that class have a place, a voice and an identity. These are the little ones, the insignificant people, whom the elite scorn as 'this rabble who do not know the law

of Moses and so are under God's curse'; or as 'You were born and raised in sin, and you are trying to teach us?' (Jn 7:49; 9:34).

Whatever be the fault and fickleness of the common crowd, Jesus likes them and stands with and for them, for they had been victims of injustice and of insult. Jesus' relation to them is tangibly different from his attitude to the ruling classes, to priests high and low (the ecclesiastical-political elite), to pharisees and lawyers (the religious elite), to the sadducees (the economic-political elite), to Herod, Pilate and Ceasar (the political elite). From these Jesus keeps his distance; of them, their teaching, their policies, Jesus is devastatingly critical; their authority he tears down publicly -- thus liberating the people from many a burden and many a chain, from unnecessary fears and scruples, and giving them a new sense of dignity and freedom, the feel and the freedom of the children of God. See Jesus' attack on the elite implied in the Beatitudes and the entire Sermon on the Mount; made explicit in his association with the outcasts of society (Mt 9); carried farther in the parable of children in the market place and the abolition of many an old load (Mt 11); and brought to a culmination in the sweeping aside of purity laws (Mt 15), and in the denunciation of leaders (Mt 20 and 23); and presented poignantly in Mk 11 and 12. The rejection of Jesus by the elite is the place where the rejection of the elite by God stands revealed. Their humanisation and salvation lies in their readiness to become children through faith, through rebirth in Jesus' own Spirit of lowliness and community with the masses, through acceptance of the foolishness of the Cross with its clear and costly options (Mt 18:2-5; 19:16-28; Lk 19:1-10; Jn 3:3-8; IC 1:18-31). The irony of the Gospel narrative and its most modern touch lies in the story of the elites' fear of the masses. How often we are told that the rulers could not arrest Jesus because they were afraid of the people who, they knew stood with Jesus as he stood with them (Mk 12:12,37). Power was already with the people. The murder of Jesus had to be plotted in secret and carried out in haste lest there be a riot among the people in favor of Jesus.

Jesus, incarnate Son of God. For Jesus incarnation was not so much as ontological something as a socio-historical

reality. Incarnation for him meant that God's creative Word had now become not things, nor just a human being, but *flesh*, a weak human being, a member of the powerless, suffering, rejected, oppressed and fragile class (Jn 1:10-11, 14). Jesus was incarnate in becoming like his brethren in every way, like Abraham's descendants in order to liberate them, not like Kedorlaomer's or Pharaoh's descendants in order to bolster up oppressive might (Gen 14; Exod 1-3). Jesus can now help those who are tempted, tested, and tried in many cruel ways in an unjust and cruel world because he himself was tested and he suffered, was historically incarnate in the life of the oppressed masses and has intimate experience of their powerlessness (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15; 5:7-10). Being a working class man and one of the exploited masses, Jesus made prayers and requests with loud cries and tears to God who could save the oppressed from death and destruction. Due to his lowly estate and his commitment to the downtrodden, God heard him, God who is always on the side of the oppressed (Ps 103:6). His obedience to God consisted in his painful struggle unto death for the liberation of God's children from the condition of the downtrodden. That is why Jesus is a New Man, made perfect through his option for the freedom of the people, and now become a source of Newness and Resurrection for all who like him are with the people within the uprising of the people.

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Samuel Rayan

The People of God

Since the Second Vatican Council it is quite common to describe the Church as the people of God. And yet, this description raises a number of questions. Is not the whole of mankind the people of God? If so, why call a section of humanity the people of God? Is the Church the people of God in a special way? And if this is true, what is the relationship of the Church, the people of God in a special sense, to mankind which is the people of God in the broad sense? These are some of the questions I would like to reflect on this article.

The people of God in the old testament

Deeply embedded in the consciousness of Israel was the conviction that it was the people of God, specially elected, called and covenanted by Yahweh. This is clearly spelt out in the Book of Deuteronomy.

“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them...” (Dt. 7:6-10).

To be sure, it is only gradually that this conviction took deep roots in the awareness of the whole people of Israel.¹ Quite

1. cf. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* I, pp. 3-35.

possibly. Israel's special connection with God stems from the time when Yahweh was regarded as its tribal god.² But then it was deepened by the experience of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (cf. Ex. Ch. 1-15), and the establishment of the covenant (cf. Ex. 19:3 24:8). As time went on all the tribes of Israel acknowledged their unique relationship to God (cf. Jos. 24:1-27), so much so that Yahweh came to be called the 'God of Israel'.³ He was thought to have an exclusive relationship to the people of Israel.

Side by side with this narrow, nationalistic conception of the people of God, there slowly emerged in the consciousness of Israel a broader, more universalist perspective. Prophet Isaiah declares that the time is coming when all the nations of the earth will have access to the mountain of the Lord (cf. 2:2-4).⁴ They will all participate in the blessings promised to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Jer. 4:2). The Book of Jonah stresses the universality of God's offer of forgiving to men (cf. 3:10; 4:11). "No limits are to be put upon the God of the covenant whose mercy extends beyond Israel".⁵ In the first Chapters of Genesis the God of Israel is depicted as the Creator of the Universe, who has made a covenant with the whole of mankind (cf. 1-2; 9:8-17). That Israel does not shrink from using the term 'covenant' to describe God's relationship to humanity at large is remarkable indeed. It is against this background we can understand the prophetic hope that God will one day come to "gather all nations and tongues" (Is. 66:18).

The people of God in the new testament

There is a noticeable tendency in the Gospels to limit the mission and ministry of Jesus to the people of Israel.⁶ He was born to "save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). He was sent to rule over it (cf. Mt. 2:6). And He was to die for it

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 203 ff.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-20.

4. cf. G. von Rad, "Die Stadt auf den Berge" in: *Gesammelte Studien Zum Alten Testament*, 1951, pp. 214-224.

5. J. C. McGowan, "Jonah," in *JBC*, pp. 633-637, here p. 637.

6. cf. J. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, pp. 11-54.

(cf. Jn. 11:50). There is no reason to believe that Jesus ever went beyond the boundaries of the Jewish population. And during His earthly life, He asked His disciples to keep away from the non-Jews. "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 10:5-6).⁷

And in the early days of the Church, the disciples obeyed this command of the Lord quite literally. They preached the Gospel to none but the Jews (cf. Acts 11:19). They thought of the Church as exclusively meant for the Jews. They did not at first perceive the absolute novelty of Christianity. This is borne out by the fact that the early Christians quite faithfully followed the religious practices of the Jews (cf. Acts 2:46). And the episode of the baptism of Cornelius and his family reveals the extreme reluctance of Peter and his fellow-Christians to open the door of church to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10:1-11:18).

And this brings us to the other tendency in the NT, to look upon Jesus as the Saviour of mankind and to regard the Church as meant for all peoples. The parables of Jesus point to the universal availability of salvation.⁸ His description of the Last Judgment indicates that He will make no distinction between the Jews and Gentiles. The same criterion of love will be used in evaluating the lives of all (cf. Mt. 25:31-46). And the writers of the NT emphatically assert that Jesus died not only for the Jewish nation, but in order "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:52; cf. also Mt. 20:28; Lk. 22:19-20; Rom., 8:32). Through his death he broke down the barrier that separated Israel from the Gentiles, thus laying the foundation for the one, united humanity (cf. Eph. 2:11-22). In Jesus Christ, God offers His forgiving love and salvation to all men, Jews and Gentiles alike (cf. Rom. 3:21-30).

As a result, the new people God acquires for Himself knows no racial or national limits. It will be gathered from

7. cf. K. Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation*, pp. 8-9 for the paradoxical attitude of Jesus towards the Gentiles.

8. cf. J. Jeremias. *The Parables of Jesus*, esp. pp. 115 ff.

among the nations (cf. Acts 15:14). For God now wishes to make His own even those who once were not His (cf. Rom. 9:25f; Eph. 2:11ff; I Pet. 2:10) in order that "they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:19). Henceforth the new people of God will be drawn from "all tribes, peoples, nations and tongues" (Apoc. 5:9; 7:9; 11:9). As St. Paul explains, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:28-29).

Does this mean that only Christians now belong to the people of God? What about the rest of the mankind? The NT does not directly deal with this question. It does, however, indicate that God is interested in and concerned about the whole of humanity. God is "not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27), and his providential care extends to all men (Cf. Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31). Besides "God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34-36; cf. also Rom. 2:11). In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God reveals His forgiving love and mercy to the whole world (cf. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:18-19). God is in truth "the Saviour of all men" (I Tim. 4:10; cf. I Tim. 2:3-6).

The people of God in Vatican II.

It is quite reasonable to believe that the people of God was a favourite term at the Second Vatican Council. For one thing, the Council was quite convinced of the communitarian nature of human salvation. "It has pleased God, however, to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into single, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness" (LG 9; cf. AG 2). For another, Vatican II wished to stress the basic equality of all the members of the Church. That is why *Lumen Gentium* speaks of the Church as the people of God, before it deals with the functional differences in the Church. "The heritage of this people are the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in his temple. Its law is the new commandment to love, as Christ

loved us (cf. Jn. 13: 34). Its goal is the Kingdom of God...' (LG 9). All this is true just as much of the ordinary faithful as of the members of the hierarchy. Besides, being a reform Council, Vatican II found it meaningful to describe the Church as the people of God, an expression that calls to mind the stiff-necked people of Israel who stands in need of constant conversion and renewal.

The Council brings out the universality of the new people of God in two ways. First it points out that the Church takes its citizens from every race. "All men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore, this people, while remaining one and unique, is to speak throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the purpose of God's will may be fulfilled" (LG 13).

Secondly, the Council insists on the link that exists between the Church and the rest of mankind. "All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the People of God, a unity which is harbinger of the universal peace it promotes. And there belong to it or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful as well as all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind. For all men are called to salvation by the grace of God" (LG 13).

Vatican II was clearly aware of the fact that the Church "does not actually include all men, and may more than once look like a small flock" (LG 9). It was equally convinced that God's plan of salvation is absolutely universal.⁹ It is the Father's intention to impart to all men a share in His own life divine (cf. LG 2). The incarnation of the Word has a truly universal character (cf. LG 7 and 12). By becoming man, Jesus "has united Himself in some fashion with every man" (GS 22). For "what he took up was our entire human nature" (AG 3). His redemptive death, too, was for all mankind (cf. GS 22). And the Spirit of Jesus is present and active in the whole world, directing the course of human history and imparting his saving grace both to Christians and non-Christians.¹⁰

9. cf. K. Kunnumpuram, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 31; cf. LG 4, 14-16; GS 22, 26, 41.

In the light of all this we can reasonably maintain that Vatican II regarded the whole of humanity as the people of God in some sense. "The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son who is the first-born of many brothers, receives the 'first-fruits of the Spirit' (Rom., 8: 23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love... Pressing upon the Christian, to be sure, are the need and the duty to do battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But linked with the Paschal Mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength that comes from hope. All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal Mystery. Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation" (*GS* 22).

If this is true, what is the function of the Church, the new people of God? It is meant to be the "universal sacrament of salvation" (*LG* 48)¹¹. The Church is the sign and sacrament of God's saving presence in the world. "For it is the function of the Church, led by the Holy Spirit who renews and purifies her ceaselessly, to make God the Father and His Incarnate Son present and in a sense visible" (*GS* 21). The Church is also the sign of men's union with God and among themselves (cf. *LG* 1). Thus, she is "a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a fellowship of life, charity and truth, it is also used by him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt. 5: 13-16) . . . God has gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and source of unity and peace, and has established them as the Church, that for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saving

11. For the Council's teaching on the Church as the 'universal Sacrament of Salvation', see K. Kunnumpuram, *op. cit.*, pp. 36 ff.

unity" (LG 9). In this way "she serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society" (GS 40).

Some reflections

1. There is a growing awareness in the Church today that God is at work everywhere in the world, offering his forgiving and saving love to the whole of mankind. Hence it is possible to call humanity itself the people of God. As Karl Rahner expresses it, "Humanity is a unity by reason of its origin and its supernatural destiny. It has only one history, to which Jesus Christ belongs. All men are comprised in the supernatural universal salvific will of God ... The movement of man's history is sustained by the offer of the divine self-communication. Hence mankind as a unity and a totality, prior to the personal decision of the individual and prior to the formation of the Church, is something constituted by the gracious act of God in Jesus Christ. If one wishes to find a name for this fact, 'people of God' suggests itself."¹²

2. We will have to learn to look upon the Church as a sign-community. It is the universal sacrament of salvation in the sense that it bears witness to God's irrevocable decision to offer salvation to all mankind. It also points to God's saving presence and activity everywhere in the world—in and outside the Church.

This implies a radical departure from the traditional way of looking at the Church. "The pre-conciliar Church seems to have understood itself as a kind of sanctuary of salvation ... A sanctuary is a place of refuge situated in a hostile environment, which justifies its existence by bringing men into its premises in order to protect and nourish them. For a long time, the Church conceived itself more or less in this way, as a kind of sacred vessel or receptacle possessed of saving resources not available, or at least not readily available, beyond its visible circumference. The mission of this church was to extend its unique riches to all men by labouring to contain all men. In principle, if not in

12. cf. K. Rahner: "The People of God" in: *Sacramentum Mundi IV*, p. 401.

fact, Vactican II brought an end to this manner of conceiving the Church, not by explicitly rejecting it, but by preferring to speak of the Church as a sign. For sign is a term and a concept which runs counter to the major premises of sanctuary-thinking, and in so doing offers a radically new starting point for reflection on the Church and its mission. Unlike a sanctuary, a sign is meant to point beyond itself and to have its impact outside itself. Unlike a sanctuary, a sign is not an enclosure, but a disclosure. A sign performs its function not by containing, but by communicating; not by annexation, but by representation. In relation to their respective environments sign is a humble image, sanctuary a haughty one; sign is an image of service, sanctuary an image of separation; a sign is co-operative, a sanctuary is competitive; a sanctuary finds within itself any action which is really important, a sign points beyond itself to where the action is. In a word, the main improvement of sign over sanctuary as an image of the Church is the quality of openness to its environment which, in application to the Church, means openness to the world."¹³

This calls for an attitudinal change on our part. We should willingly and joyfully admit the presence of grace and the possibility of salvation outside the boundaries of the Church. We should readily renounce the wrong idea that it is a privilege to belong to the Church, that it is easier for a Christian to be saved than for a non-christian.¹⁴ Actually, membership in the

13. W. B. Fraizier, "Guidelines for a New Theology of Mission" in *Worldmission*, 18 (Winter 1967-68) 4, pp. 16-24, here pp. 18-19.

14. "He is not saved, however, who, though he is part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but, as it were, only in a 'bodily' manner and not 'in his heart.' All the sons of the Church should remember that their exalted status is to be attributed not to their own merits but to the special grace of Christ. If they fail moreover to respond to that grace in thought, word, and deed, not only will they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged." LG 14.

Church is a great responsibility and a grave risk.¹⁵ We should regard it as the primary task of the Church to be a credible sign of God's saving presence in the world. Hence it may be misplaced zeal on her part if the Church were to spend all her energies in baptizing as many people as possible, without sufficient attention being paid to their pastoral care, or if she were to water down the demands of Christian life in order to keep large numbers in her fold.

3. We need to face honestly the question if the Church alone is a sign of salvation in the world. Can Hinduism, Buddhism or any other religion fulfil this function? My own answer, tentative and provisional, is in the affirmative. It seems undeniable that for millions of human beings in India and elsewhere the Church does not fulfil the function of being a sign of salvation, either because she is non-existent in their neighbourhood or because she is non-credible. In fact, therefore, some other community plays the role of being a sign of salvation for these people, unless we wish to maintain that God has left them without any social sign of His saving presence. In principle, too, there is need for other signs of salvation. When we reflect on the fact that humanity has lived for more than a million years on the face of the earth, and that God has at all times been genuinely concerned about its salvation, we are forced to admit that He has provided it with many signs of His saving presence and activity. After all, the Church occupies only a small part of the total history of mankind. Geographically, too, she is not present to all areas of the globe. In the light of all this, I venture to suggest that Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions can rightly be regarded as signs of God's saving presence in the world.

This is, I feel, quite in keeping with the tradition of the Church. "*Tradition* does not signify mere repetition of objective formulations of the faith. It signifies an ever deeper exploration of the revealed Word, through which the awareness of the Church sheds greater light on the content of this divine revelation".¹⁶

15. cf. J. L. Segundo, *The Community called the Church*, esp. pp. 3-77.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Now it is well-known that the early Christians thought of the Church as part of the Jewish religion. That is why they were faithful to Jewish religious practices. That is also the reason for their preaching the Gospel to none but the Jews. Gradually, faced with new experiences and confronted with new situations, they began to reflect on the nature of the Church and came to a new understanding of it. The Church, they realized, is meant for the Jews and the Gentiles alike. But for many centuries Christian leadership believed that there was no salvation outside the Church. In modern times, they came to realize that Christians were a minority. What about the millions of human beings who were not Christians? In our own day, the Church has clearly seen the implications of her faith in God's universal salvific will. God does in fact open the possibility of salvation to all human beings. Still, the Church holds that she is the universal sacrament of salvation, the sign of salvation even to those who are outside her boundaries. Now, perhaps, the time has come to broaden our perspectives still more, and to admit that there can be other signs of God's saving presence in the world, the more so since the Church as the sign of salvation is not available to millions of human beings on the face of the earth today.

Kurien Kunnumpuram

The People of God

In God's plan the whole of mankind were to be the people of God. His plan was to invite all mankind into a Covenant-relationship with him. He had no other plan for human beings whom he created out of love. The essential meaning of the Covenant is that God wants to be with us and he wants us to be with him. From the beginning he has been absolutely faithful to his plan even when human beings have proved largely unfaithful in the course of their long history. This means that he has not changed his plan of including every human being among his people, in his kingdom. At the same time in the scriptures great emphasis is laid on the need of our personal cooperation with God's grace for the realisation of his plan of sharing his life and love with us.

In our thinking about the Church as God's people and theological formulations of its reality, it is doubtful whether we have paid enough attention to God's *universal will* of salvation and to the *personal factor* in the formation of the kingdom of God. Perhaps in traditional Catholic theology there has been an unjustifiable concentration on, and preoccupation with external, visible, organisational, ritual, hierarchical, verifiable factors, involving a serious neglect of the more vital, interior, personal, intangible, mystical factors. This is what I wish to suggest in this article by a review of the relevant biblical data.

1. God's universal will of salvation

The Paradise story of Genesis 2-3 is a clear affirmation of God's Covenant with *all* mankind. The author of this story was not writing history. His obvious purpose was to speak of God's plan for mankind at their first appearance on our earth. The source of his understanding of this question is not historical information but theological reflection. It is clear to him that God has essentially the same plan for all peoples, the plan of salvation which means sharing in God's own life. This was a remarkable insight on the part of the Hebrew author who believed in the special election of his own people. This fact of

special election did not prevent him from recognising that his own people were but one among all the many peoples who all belonged to God as Creator and Saviour.

The word of God, the word of divine invitation, the promise of eternal life had been addressed to the very first human beings, and it continued to be addressed to them and their descendants throughout all history. The implications of this affirmation are revolutionary. Paradoxically the Hebrew author's main affirmation in the story is not that mankind responded to God's invitation, but that they failed to respond.

2. How can God's kingdom come on earth?

The creation stories also indicate the conditions on which alone the reign of God can be realised on earth. Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. This is correctly to be understood as God's *challenge* to us. We are not automatically like God. Humanness is not equated with God-likeness. Rather, the idea is that we have been given the *capacity* to become like God through our freely responding to the Spirit within us. So it is left to the free choice and decision and responsibility of each human being whether he or she would become like God. This means that God does not do everything to us as he does everything to the rest of creation—to matter and plants and trees and animals. We have the power to make or unmake ourselves, to become authentic human beings or not. The workability of God's plan requires that we retain this power even when the environment is most unfavourable. This shows the special nobility and dignity of human beings.

3. God's fidelity to his plan

That Paradise was lost means that temporarily God's reign could not be realised on earth because human beings failed to cooperate with him and to become God like. They are not inherently incapable of achieving this goal, and so God's plan remains unchanged. The first period of our history is marked by God's offer of Paradise and its non realisation through human beings continuing to wander away from him. The unity and harmony and peace of the human family, which are in the plan of God, could only be realised very imperfectly. This is the

period of the progressive dispersion of mankind. They are divided into conflicting and warring groups. There are bitter conflicts and self-destruction within each group and among the groups.

The significant fact is that God has not withdrawn from this world of "fallen" human beings. He is fully present, and he continues to ask for their cooperation. He is present and active in order to see to it that evil does not triumph over good, and falsehood does not triumph over truth in spite of human perversity (see Gen. 3:15). These truths are illustrated through the biblical stories of the Flood and the Tower of Babel.

4. God associates men with himself in his new redemption initiatives

The Abraham story illustrates a complementary truth. God continues to work in our world through individuals who firmly commit themselves to him. There is no reason at all why we should understand the praise and glorification of Abraham's faith in an exclusive sense, as if there were no others in the whole world who were faithful like him. This view is supported by the earlier mention in the Bible of remarkably faithful individuals like Abel, Enoch and Noah. Our real world is characterised by the *two ways* of fidelity and infidelity. Both are open to every individual. In the Abraham story the emphasis is on God's free initiative. God chooses to associate a humble obscure individual with himself in his scheme of world redemption.

The Abraham story is full of precious insights into the character of God's people. If God is real and his Covenant with mankind is real, then it is very foolish for people to imagine that they could achieve success and prosperity and glory apart from God. The truly righteous person, the wise person is the one who recognises God, commits oneself to God, and wants to be led by God's Spirit all the time. The only way to make sure of true success is actively to depend on God who has graciously chosen to be with mankind. God ought to be more real to a person than anyone or anything else. According to the tradition of the Jews, Abraham their ancestor was such a person. God was more real to Abraham than his only son. Man's true life and peace and joy must consist in doing God's will disinterestedly. This presupposes intimacy with God and constant communion with him. God's Covenant-plan cannot be realised apart

from people having these qualities. A person like Abraham, who became intimate with God, is not only blessed in himself but could also be a source of abundant blessing to the rest of mankind.

5. God's plan of creating a priestly people

God works in our world through human beings who commit themselves to him and become united with him in love and fidelity. God wants them to be mediators of his love, his concern, his liberating activity. While God wanted to bless the whole of mankind through Abraham and his descendants, they themselves became an oppressed and enslaved people in the course of their history. God then came to their deliverance. Once again the fact of mediation is stressed. God chose and sent and equipped a member of his oppressed people for the purpose of bringing them deliverance. What we see here is simply a revival of the Covenant idea and plan. God is obviously engaged all the time in his work of universal redemption or liberation. He chooses an oppressed people for a very special role of mediation. He first saves them from oppression, gathers them and makes them a new united people who know him and are assimilated to him. This work was to be done through one man, Moses, who was made to realise that the God of compassion and deliverance was with him. Through him a whole people must realise the same truth.

It was perfectly clear to Moses that the work of deliverance that he accomplished did not originate in him. He had failed miserably, become an exile, and had no further hope of being able to do anything for his own people. He returned to his people only because he became convinced that God was sending him. In the course of his mission he had ample evidence of his own helplessness and of how repeatedly God came to his rescue in unforeseeable ways in crisis after crisis. The ultimate purpose of his mission was to transmit to a whole people his own experience of the presence and activity of God of love, justice and compassion. A people who had such an experience of God would be a new people.

According to the Bible it is for the first time in the history of salvation that there is question of the creation of a

new people of this kind. The Sinai Covenant meant that a whole people were taught the truth about the one true God and his invitation to mankind through one man who acted as a mediator. The purpose was that this whole people might be mediators between God and all the other peoples (Exod. 19:3f).

6. The unsolved problem of the people of God

Still, paradoxically, in the rest of the Bible the subsequent life of this new people is presented as an unsolved problem rather than a really new breakthrough. They were a new people through being supposedly committed to the God of love and justice, and becoming renewed in themselves through this commitment. But all this could not be taken for granted. Even if we suppose that the people committed themselves to the God of truth and love at Sinai, their *continuing* to be so committed would depend *on them* from day to day, and from year to year. Similarly it would depend on the future generations of this people. Ominous hints about the gravity of this problem are present already in the Exodus narrative about the birth of this people (Exod. 15-19). The people who committed themselves to the guidance of Moses, the servant of God, at the crossing of the Red Sea became increasingly restive and rebellious as they experienced the difficulties of their sojourn in the wilderness. The situation was so serious that Moses thought there was danger of the people stoning him (17:4). Surely this was a bad beginning for the holy people of God.

The settlement in Palestine did not solve the problem. Their life under the Judges was marked by continual backsliding (Jud. 2:10f). The unification of all the twelve tribes under David was a fresh hopeful beginning. But the sequel belied the hope. Under Solomon's successor Rehoboam the united kingdom was split into two. The new people that God had created were no longer one. According to I Kings 11 the split had the blessing of God. Under the circumstances created by Rehoboam it was inevitable.

7. The radical questioning of the prophets

Did the two sister Hebrew kingdoms deserve the name of God's people? The prophets had serious misgivings. Amos was

not sure that the Israelite people were any better than their Gentile neighbours. While these latter invited their own destruction by their flagrant violation of God's law of love and justice, the "chosen" people did the same. God's special choice of them only increased their responsibility and guilt. It was no guarantee of his continued favour if they failed to respond to him in their personal and social life. The God who came to their rescue in Egypt is equally the God of all peoples: he governs the origin and destiny of all peoples (Amos 9:7). Hosea is equally severe in his criticism of his own people: they have apostatised from the God of the Covenant so that he is obliged to call them "Not-My-People". There was hope because of God's mercy, but the time of the renewal of the Covenant through God's mercy could not be foreseen.

Isaiah has no illusions about the holiness of his own people. At the time of his call by God he thinks of himself as a sinful man living among a sinful people. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib, but Israel does not know Yahweh, their Covenant-God. They do not understand his thoughts and ways. Though called to be a holy people, they continued to be sinful. They are the offspring of Abraham, the friend of God, but they have become evil-doers unlike their ancestor. God has made them his beloved children through the Covenant, but they had forfeited their divine status by dealing corruptly with one another.

Isaiah uses strong language. The people have forsaken Yahweh, despised the Holy One who had chosen them and made them his own; they were utterly estranged from him. The prophet goes so far as to say that the supposedly faithful city of Jerusalem had become a harlot, no better than Sodom and Gomorrah (Is. 1). Not only pagan lands but the land of Israel and Judah is also filled with idols; here also the people bow down to the work of their hands. Apostasy from Yahweh, their Covenant God, had led to the utter corruption of their social and political life. The people were oppressing one another; the youth were insolent to the elders, and the base fellows to the honourable. The speech and deeds of the people were against the Lord, defying his glorious presence (Is. 2).

8. Responsibility for this tragedy

Isaiah thought that the civil, political and religious leaders were largely responsible for this state of affairs. "O my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths" (3:12). The princes were rebels, companions of thieves; the officials loved bribes and ran after gifts, but did not care to defend the fatherless or to judge the widow's cause justly. Isaiah was having his prophetic ministry at a period of history when the two Hebrew kingdoms were passing through one serious crisis after another. He saw with his own eyes the immense harm that the last kings of Israel and kings of Judah like Ahaz had done to the people. Both kings and people failed to realise that foreign enemies were not the real threat against their security. The real problem was that they failed to become God's people by committing themselves to the God who had chosen and called them. The people and their leaders were so unwilling to listen to the prophet that he could only wait patiently for the Lord who was hiding his face from them in their rebelliousness. The prophet never ceased to hope in the Lord (Is. 8:5f).

The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah. He too was convinced that the wound of the peoples of Israel and Judah was humanly incurable. Like Isaiah, he saw wrong leadership as a chief problem. How could the people learn justice if the leaders themselves perverted justice? Micah denounces the leaders in the severest terms. They hated the good and loved the evil; they tore the skin from off the people, their flesh from off their bones, ate the flesh of the people, broke their bones in pieces and chopped them up like meat in a cauldron. They were building Jerusalem with blood. The judges gave judgement for a bribe; the priests taught for hire, and the prophets divined for money. Still they were blind enough to assume that the Lord was in their midst, and no evil would come upon them. They led the people astray by crying 'Peace, Peace' when *they* had something to eat, and declaring war against those who put nothing into their mouths. No effort whatever was made to ensure the reign of justice and righteousness among the people (Mich. 3).

Though Jeremiah had his ministry in the kingdom of Judah a century later, the problems he had to face were very similar. The root problem was the lack of true religion among God's

people. The priests who were the guardians of the Law that God had given to the people through Moses, did not know God. The civil rulers were unmindful of God's Law. The prophets had received no commission from God.

According to Jeremiah, the people as a whole had broken the Covenant that God had made with them. They had apostatised, made their faces harder than rock, and refused to take correction, to repent. Neither the poor nor the great paid attention to the way of the Lord, the Law of their God. "They all alike had broken the yoke, they had burst the bonds... From the least of them to the greatest every one is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest every one deals falsely" (Jer. 5-6).

At the same time they cherished the illusion that they could make sure of God's protection of them and of their country by the zealous performance of ritual worship centred in the Jerusalem Temple. Jeremiah groaned inwardly, suffered intensely, and shed profuse tears over the apostasy of his people. "For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded; I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me" (8:21). Jeremiah is a most powerful exponent of the interiority and personalism of true religion. He realised that all the many holy religious institutions of his people the Covenant, the Law, the temple, the priesthood, the sacrificial worship, prophetism and the rest had failed to make the people holy. Whole passages of Jeremiah are an impassioned plea for personal religion. Man cannot teach man to know God. Each one must allow oneself to be purified by God so as to know him, and be reconciled with him. In this case God's Law will not be simply an external norm, but will be written on one's heart. Sincerely seeking God's will as expressed in his Law, and doing it in one's life are the only sign of true knowledge of God, and the only means of building up the community. External forms of religion in plenty can coexist with real apostasy from God and alienation from one's fellowmen.

9. The decimation and death of the people of God

Ezekiel, a younger contemporary of Jeremiah, goes beyond all his predecessors in the severity of his criticism of his own people. The radical questioning of the prophets reaches its

climax in him. He is not afraid of affirming that God's plan of creating a new people has been frustrated through the people's rebelliousness and hardheartedness. This amounts to denying that the ideal of God's people ever became a historical reality. God's dream of creating a people of his own was not realised at creation and in the subsequent period, nor was it realised in the period after Moses. Ezekiel does not hesitate to say that the people of Judah, the chosen people, are not better than the people of Israel (the heretical kingdom) who were destroyed by the Assyrians, or the people of Sodom (non-Jews) who were destroyed by fire from God. "Within a very little time you were more corrupt than they (Samaria and Sodom) in all your ways... You have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations which you have committed" (Ez. 16:47-51).

Ezekiel has a vision in which he sees a valley strewn with dead men's bones. This expressed his conviction that God's people were no longer a living reality; they were dead. The Spirit of God had departed from them because of their persistence in wrongdoing. Like all the prophets Ezekiel was convinced at the same time that God had not abandoned his people. His plan of love and purposes of mercy remained unchanged. God still wanted to send his Spirit powerfully on his erring and lost people so that they could live and flourish as he wanted them to do.³⁷ What the people lacked was inner transformation. God never ceased to invite them to this personal task. If only they were willing, God would sprinkle clean water on them, and cleanse them from all their impurity, and they would be pure in his sight; he would take away their stony hearts, and put loving and feeling hearts within them, and they would be truly God's people, and he would be their God.

It was clear to Ezekiel that the self appointed self-seeking civil and religious leaders of the people had much to do with the creation of their tragic situation. The leaders had been feeding themselves instead of feeding the people. They had not strengthened the weak, nor healed the sick, nor bound up the bruised, nor brought back the strayed, nor sought the lost. Consequently the sheep had been scattered, and become a prey to their enemies. Faced with this tragic situation, the prophet concentrates his hope on the ideal leader to come, the Messiah whom God would send.

10. Present disillusionment combined with universalistic hopes

An insight that finds its clearest expression in the book of Second Isaiah (6th c. B. C.) is that the Servant-Saviour, whom God will send for the definitive fulfilment of his work, will bring about the restoration not only of the Israelite people but of all peoples everywhere. The mission of the Servant of the Lord, anointed by his Spirit, will be to bring forth salvation to all peoples, to establish God's order of righteousness in the whole earth. All the peoples of the world are pictured as waiting for this unique Saviour (Is. 42:1-4).

He is sent into the world as a light to all peoples, so that God's salvation may reach to the end of the earth (49:6). The expressions used in the most famous Servant-passages (52:13-53:12) to describe the person and the work of the Servant are both mysterious and revealing. He will startle many nations; kings will shut their mouths because of him. Many peoples who despised him as a man of sorrows and did not esteem him, will finally recognise the truth about him, about his suffering for the sake of mankind, and his exaltation as the Saviour of all peoples.

Thus gradually the prophets and the wise men of the Old Testament came to the clear perception that the separation between the Israelites and non-Israelites was one day to be transcended. The experience of the fallibility of holy institutions led to an interiorisation and personalisation of religion where the Spirit's action and man's response were recognised as decisive. The Spirit's action is of course open to everyone. These insights were, however, not widely shared by the Jewish community as a whole. In the postexilic age the attitude of many of the Jews towards foreign peoples was characterised by hostility, narrowness, prejudice, condemnation and self-righteousness. The Book of Jonah was written to correct this fanatical exclusivist approach. The Book shows how ridiculous narrowness is in a believer, how other peoples are not worse than the Jews, how God loves all peoples and calls them to reconciliation with himself, how God has no delight in the death of the living and is therefore the Saviour not only of men but even of cattle.

Thus the wise and enlightened among the Israelite faithful

arrived at the view that all so-called foreigners who are willing to abide by God's Law and belong in his Covenant, will be fully accepted as sons and daughters into the community of God's own people. God's house will then become a house of prayer for all peoples; all will rejoice together in his presence (see Is. 56:3f).

11. God's universal call embodied in one Person

The New Testament proclaims Jesus Christ as the One in whom these universalistic dreams of the Old Testament are fully realised. He came not for the Israelite nation only, "but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:52). The whole history of mankind, as presented in the Bible, is referred to here; it is a history of scattering abroad since the time when Cain went away and settled in the land of Nod(= wandering). Jesus does not think of himself as the shepherd of the fold of Israel. Rather, he has other sheep that are not of the Israelite fold. His work is to seek them and tend them, so that all may hear his voice, and the ideal, 'one flock, one shepherd' may be realised (Jn. 10).

New Testament thinking agrees with the prophets' radical criticism of the historically visible people of God. According to John the Baptist, the Messiah who was about to come would not be partial to his own people. He who comes to save them will also judge them. They could not find favour in his sight simply because racially they were the descendants of Abraham. His scrutiny would go far deeper. "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees: every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Lk. 3:9). There will be a thorough sifting: "he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:12). John's thought here agrees with what Paul was to say later. The true children of Abraham are not those who are physically or legally descended from him and are circumcised, but all those who are committed to God as Abraham was, and are consequently righteous in their life, whether they are circumcised or not.

This insight is most remarkable. It is clearly recognised that it is very wrong to identify the people of God with the

Jewish people, simply because God does not see as man sees. Man looks at externals; God looks at the heart. It is the internal and the personal that are primary and decisive; the external is secondary, and ambiguous in itself. It has its value in relation to the internal.

12. Jesus confirms the radicalism of the prophets

The above view is fully supported by the recorded sayings of Jesus. He took care to point out that true faith was not confined within Israel who were remarkable not for their faith but for lack of it. He compared his own people unfavourably with the pagan peoples of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, and said that on the Day of Judgment these foreign peoples would have less to fear from God than the people of Israel (Mt. 11: 20f.). Jesus could praise the faith and spirit and attitude of a foreigner and say: "Not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from the East and West and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" (Mt. 8: 10f.).

The sayings of Jesus about his having come to seek sinners, the lost, about the first becoming last and the last becoming first, about the elder son who proves worse than the lost younger son, about the rebellious son who later repents and obeys while the son who professed obedience does not obey, about the first tenants who kill the householder's son and the new tenants who replace them—all are illustrating the mysterious question: who really are pleasing in God's sight? Jesus does not hesitate to say that reputed sinners like the tax-collectors and the harlots can be more confident about entering God's kingdom than the Pharisees and scribes, the chief priests and the elders (Mt. 21: 31).

13. Jesus puts the emphasis on the interior and the personal

According to Jesus and his disciples, what is really new about the community that Jesus came to found, is that the people would have been "baptised with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1: 5). This includes the twin aspects of purification or personal conversion, and enlightenment or transformation. The heeding of the good news as proclaimed by the disciples of Jesus from

Pentecost onwards must mean receiving from God the grace of repentance and forgiveness of sins. This means personal reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit which is involved in one's acceptance of the good news, must mean that there is personal grasp of the mystery of Jesus, of his death and resurrection, self-commitment to the risen Lord, assimilation to his holiness, sharing in his life, love, mission and power. Such is the significance of the christian communities that began to be formed and nurtured from Pentecost Day onwards (Acts 4: 32f).

14. Have christian communities learned from the self-criticism of the prophets?

A relevant question about our present-day christian communities is: can they be really considered as prolongations in time and space of the first Pentecostal communities? (see Acts 5: 14; 6: 7). Does the problem of the believing community as seen and stated by the prophets — the problem of each member's self-commitment to God, and consequent transformation into God-likeness — does this problem exist in regard to christian communities? Are Christ's various promises to his church a guarantee that they will solve this problem, and remain faithful as a whole, so that the new Israel will be visibly different from the old? There is no evidence in the New Testament scriptures for answering this question in the affirmative. Rather, the indications are to the contrary.

There is the mysterious saying of Jesus himself: "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk. 18: 8). St. Paul says that the infidelities of the old people of God are recorded in their scriptures as a warning for christians, for the instruction of christians who live in the last age of salvation. So, if they think that they stand, they should take heed lest they fall. Christians are challenged to much greater fidelity, and are offered in Christ the possibility of it; but their achieving it in practice must depend on their vigilance (see Lk. 21: 36).

St. Paul treats this question again in Romans 11. Some branches of the olive tree of his people which God planted have been broken off because of their unbelief. Christians, the

new branches which have been grafted in the place of the old branches, can stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you *provided* you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off."

The Letters to the Seven Churches in the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation sound a note of serious warning: they remind the churches of their own defectibility. "I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then ... repent ... If not, I will remove your lampstand from its place. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God" (Rev. 2: 4f; see 21: 8f; Mt. 13: 47f). That individual christian communities are exposed to the danger of apostasy from Jesus Christ their crucified Lord, is clearly recognised in the Letter to the Hebrews (6: 4f; 10: 26; 12: 25).

15. The mystery of the membership of God's people

We have seen that the externals of religion (the use of sacraments, scriptures etc.) do not necessarily imply the presence of the personal and the interior. This latter is the result of a person responding to God's Spirit. The inner transformation worked by the Spirit where persons are open to his action, may be present even where specific externals of religion are missing for some legitimate reason or other. In the light of these facts, the question arises: In the sight of God, which persons in the churches and in the world truly belong in his people?

The clearest answer to this question has been given us by St. Paul in the second chapter of his Letter to Romans. The fundamental scriptural principle on which Paul bases himself is that there is only one true God, and he is the Judge and Saviour of all peoples. He has called all peoples from the beginning to the same destiny of salvation in himself - a salvation progressively revealed in the history and records of the Old Testament and definitively revealed in Jesus Christ and in his church (Heb. 1:1 f). Through the prophets and through Jesus Christ God has granted a special revelation of himself and his law of love

to Jews and Christians. But at the same time he has not failed to reveal himself or law to any single human being. God's law is written on the hearts of all people by the Holy Spirit and voiced in their conscience. So every person can know God and his law through his or her own human nature.

But it is not the *knowing* of God's law that saves; only the *doing* of the law saves. On Judgment Day God will not divide mankind into groups according to different religions or the lack of forms of religion. He will separate them into two basic groups, the righteous and the unrighteous. Paul's basic conviction is that God will render to every one not according to his profession, but according to his life and works. All those who were patient in well-doing will gain the peace and happiness of eternal life, but all those who refused to obey the truth will suffer tribulation. All will be judged by the only standard of Jesus Christ - whether by their life they have attained to Christ-likeness or not.

16. The common error of over-reliance on externals

When we apply these scriptural principles so convincingly stated by Paul, we arrive at certain inescapable conclusions. The members of the visible christian communities are not necessarily saved by the fact of their having such aids to salvation as the scriptures and the sacraments. One who is ritually baptised is unbaptised (uncleansed) in the sight of God if, as an adult, he does not obey God's law of love in his life. Such a person is outwardly christian, but inwardly non-christian. Being really christian means being assimilated to Christ: this never happens merely through knowledge, but only through consistent obedience to the Spirit of Christ.

On the other hand, the many who find themselves outside the visible christian communities are not condemned because they were without external saving aids like the scriptures and the sacraments. As already stated, they are judged by whether they have obeyed God's law in their life. If they have, which is quite possible since God's Spirit is given to every one without discrimination or measure, they are outwardly non-christian, but inwardly christian. They are unbaptised in the sight of men, but baptised (purified and transformed) in the

sight of God. Through circumstances they are without the *rite* of baptism, but its *meaning* is realised in them. Even if they do not receive praise from men, they will receive it from God. On the last day such people will condemn those who have been christian and have enjoyed the advantages of the christian tradition, but who were not truly christian because they failed to keep God's law.

17. The gates of God's City remain wide open

The boundaries of the visible christian communities may not be thought of as closed or clearly drawn. The boundary remains wide open for two reasons. Those who are within but not inwardly christian, have no right to be where they are; they are in danger of exclusion (Rev. 21:8). Those who are apparently outside, but are inwardly christian belong in the Body of Christ; they belong invisibly to the visible community of his followers. They have the right of entrance into the holy City.

Some experience the difficulty that, if the above considerations are right, they seem to lessen considerably the need and urgency of the church's task of evangelisation or missionary effort. This difficulty involves a serious misunderstanding of the biblical position as expressed by Paul and others. That every one *can* be saved does not mean that he or she is already saved. The availability of the Spirit's action which is always there, does not abolish the fact that so many people are still groping in darkness. They desperately need that the Spirit's invisible action should be mediated to them through human visible tangible forms which is the very basis of the Incarnation. The significance of this mystery is not temporal or local but universal and cosmic. A common mistake made even by christians is to think of the action of the Word-made-flesh as confined in space and time whereas it is absolutely transcendent and cosmic. The world had been created in the Word and for the Word, and the Word has always been present in the world and to all human beings.

The missionary action of the church is the continuation of the action of the Incarnate Word; it can never be thought of as optional. Christ's idea of the visible community of his

followers is that they are to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. The relevant question is whether the visible christian communities answer this idea. If they don't obviously their effectiveness for Christ's work of evangelisation is diminished. Paul went so far as to say that the name of God is blasphemed among the gentile peoples because of so-called believers who fail to live up to their religious profession (Rom. 2 : 24).

The scriptural positions we have tried to outline could amount to a radical questioning of many of our usual easy assumptions about the church of Jesus Christ. It is much more than question of the verifiable membership of a visible religious institution; it is the unfathomable mystery of visible and tangible christ-likeness in our world. "As you did it or did it not to one of the least of these my brethren..."

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People as Promise

The new heaven and the new earth held up as objects of our hope in the book of Revelation is described as a happy community with whom God himself will be 'at home.'

Now God's home is with mankind! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. (Rev. 21: 3-4).

What strikes one here is that the goal is not pictured in material, cosmic or physical terms. It is a vision of a people, of joy and fulfilment, of fellowship with God. The end of history is not an earthly paradise; it is a happy and contented nation.

God's Plan and Promise

This accent on people as the promise is right in biblical tradition. Calling Abraham to leave his land and his people, the Lord promises, "I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation" (Gen. 12: 2). The promise is repeated again when Abraham did not hesitate to sacrifice his son Isaac: "I promise that I will give you as many descendants as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand along the sea shore" (Gen. 22: 17). Jacob hears the same promise: "Nations will be descended from you" (Gen. 35: 11). God makes his covenant with a people: "The whole earth is mine, but you will be my chosen people, a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests" (Exod. 19: 5-6). The theme recurs again in the prophets. Just a sample from Isaiah: "The new Jerusalem I make will be full of joy, and her people will be happy" (Is. 65: 18).

The images of the banquet and the kingdom bring out vividly in symbolic terms this picture of a happy people. The banquet is a symbol of fellowship, joy and celebration. Jesus speaks of the kingdom as a feast (Cf. Lk. 14: 15-24). He tells

his disciples at the last supper: "I will never eat it until it is given its full meaning in the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 22: 16) The Kingdom itself is a human reality, "because the Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17: 21).

Though the festive meal and the kingdom are human and living realities, still they have something static about them. One could very well imagine something that descends from heaven ready-made: "The new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband" (Rev. 21: 2). The Jews certainly were looking forward to a kingdom of peace, joy and prosperity, ushered in by a victorious king, after a war of liberation.

But a number of other images used by Jesus with reference to the Kingdom offer a more dynamic perspective. Jesus speaks of a seed that grows into a big tree (Mt. 13: 31-32), of a field that yields a rich harvest (Mt. 13: 3-23), of a vine that produces fruit in abundance (Jn. 15: 1-5). These images underline a number of interesting factors. The kingdom is first of all something that is growing. It is a historical process. The happy community which is the object of the promise is not only an end; it is a goal towards which history is moving. Secondly this growth is not quantitative, from the outside, like the growth in numbers of an organization, but qualitative and organic. The goal is a fulfilment. It is something sought after, achieved, created. It is not what one gets, but what one becomes, what one makes of oneself, whatever be the role of other supportive elements. The creative Spirit of God works from within. Set in the context of cosmic history, the mystery of God's plan, the promise takes concrete shape in bringing together all things with Christ as head.

All things are done according to God's plan and decision; and God chose us to be his own people in union with Christ because of his own purpose, based on what he had decided from the very beginning... You also became God's people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and God

put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised. The Spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people, and this assures us that God will give complete freedom to those who are his" (Eph. 1: 11, 13-14).

The promise, then, is both a gift and a task. It is the work of the Spirit (Rom. 8: 18-23). But the Spirit only frees our own inner energies making it possible for them to grow unhindered. As Paul says: "I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ has already won me to himself" (Phil. 3: 12).

From his brief look into the Bible I retain three areas for further reflection. God's promise concerns man. The realization of this promise is a process of growth. This growth is not only a gift, but a creative task. Let me explore the implication of each of these three statements.

Humanisation

Development is a much abused term today. Everyone speaks of it. One hears of developing countries or societies and developed nations. One often notices that a humanistic perspective is often lacking in this talk of development. One speaks of it in material, economic, social and political terms; one often forgets that all these are meaningful only with reference to man. Scientific progress is taking great strides today. Man is not only delving deeper into the atom. His mechanical arms reach out farther into the universe. His control over nature is steadily expanding to the extent of posing a threat to the ecological balance of nature itself. But what is all this material development for? What meaning has it for man and his life on this planet? How does it contribute to the development of man, of the human community? Has man rather become the slave of his machine? Will the power released by science be used to destroy rather than to construct the community of man? What is the goal of scientific progress: humanisation of matter or mechanisation of man?

It is not rare to see people speaking of development in terms of the growth of the gross national product or of the augmentation of the per capita income. Industrialisation is considered a must. Factories are constructed. Commerce is on the increase. Multi-national corporations are built up. More and more goods are produced and distributed. Correspondingly urban slums are multiplied; rural areas are impoverished; the gap between the rich and the poor keeps on widening. The miracle of economic growth is the misery of millions. Brazil is a good modern example. One cannot refrain from asking: economic growth at what cost? the production of more and more goods for whose benefit? exploitation of natural resources for the enrichment of whom? Who is benefited by the vast network of international trade? Has economic growth become an idol that has to be worshipped irrespective of its consequences?

The advance of civilization is helping 'primitive' societies to modernize themselves. There is increasing urbanisation. The school system is reaching out into the remote parts of the country. But urbanization has led to a break-down of traditional social structures without replacing them, creating a sense of disorientation or *anomie*. Moral and value education has not kept pace with the literacy programme. Culture has become marginal and elitist. Man has lost his personality to become a number in an ever increasing amorphous mass.

In a competitive world, becoming increasingly smaller owing to modern means of communication, men feel the need for organizing themselves. But organizations have the tendency to transform themselves from instruments of service to centres of power. There is a progressive centralisation that reaches out beyond national boundaries to the formation of power-blocs. Leadership is achieved through military might, not through moral authority.

Material, economic, social and political development should be at the service of human development. But as a matter of fact they succeed in enslaving and de-humanising man. Instead of man humanizing nature, man himself is de-humanized. The economic, social and political elite seem to benefit from

this situation. But actually they also become pawns in the power game. They are more slaves of the system than its masters.

God's promise of a community of love, of sharing, or joy, of freedom seems totally absent in this process. Man has succeeded in the extraordinary task of enslaving himself. Priorities have got mixed up. The first need then is to create an awareness that development has meaning and value only in relation to man. The world is for man. Man is the centre of the universe. Every advancement, in whatever sphere, must contribute to the building up of the human community. For this moral development must go hand in hand with material development. When man has lost sight of this goal progress loses its purpose and direction.

Freedom

The Kingdom of heaven is like a seed. The seed is buried deep in the earth and it dies. But that death is the starting point of its life and growth. The growth is the manifestation of the living force it has and it takes place in a constant dialectic with the non-living material world that surrounds it. Only a totally hostile atmosphere can stifle its growth.

Every child is born into a world. It is hemmed in on every side by a variety of factors - familial, cultural, social, economic. None of these completely controls its growth. But it is in a constant interaction with these factors that it grows into mature manhood. The only obstacle that can stifle its growth is the denial of its freedom.

Man - humanity - is also a seed. The happy community that is promised to him by God is something that he has to grow into. But this growth is a dialectical process. Humanity is not a plant in a glass house. It is in a world consisting of the material, economic, social and political structures that it has itself evolved. But the human spirit, in freedom, can transform them. It can change what it has created. (I speak, of course, of the new humanity, redeemed by Christ and energized by the Spirit). The many reform movements and liberation struggles that ornament the history of every people is an enduring witness

to this hope. The power of man to realize his full humanity as man in spite of and in the midst of the shackles of *karma* and *maya* is axiomatic in Indian tradition. From Buddha to Gandhi through Nanak and Kabir, Indian history is a string of liberation movements from the various bonds that keep his creativity enslaved.

If the pictures of humanity marching towards its ultimate freedom and fulfilment does not look very bright today one reason is that the social and structural dimensions of the problem have not been fully realized. Men often worked for the personal freedom of themselves and of others. This led them to opt out of the structures rather than work to transform them. Freedom was perceived as personal and interior. Today however there is a growing awareness of the global dimensions of the problem and the need to face it as a global community.

The term global may be taken in two senses. Geographically, no isolated freedom movements would be effective today. Humanly speaking the battle for freedom should be fought at all levels: material, economic, social, and political. One can add to this list religion too, where it has lost its Spirit of freedom and become oppressive law.

Where there is freedom and a clear vision of the goal every thing can become a factor for growth. Scientific progress can enable men to use leisure for creation. The media of communication can promote awareness rather than diffuse propaganda. Goods can not only be produced in abundance, but shared and distributed equitably. Human communities can be built up on the basis of love and service rather than fear and power. Communication can promote global unity rather than facilitate exploitation. Thus man's creativity and inventiveness can be put to positive ends of building a happy human community.

Creativity

This leads me to my third observation. The true image of the new man is not man the worker, but man the creator. There may have been a period when to work and to create were the same thing. But it is not so today, except in a few cases of artistic production. Both may involve the same type of physical

and/or mental effort. But they are different kinds of experiences. Work corresponds to a need that has to be met and produces goods. Creation is life, gratuitous, has no purpose beyond the act itself. Work is painful and is undergone as an unavoidable drudgery. Creation is an experience of joy and harmony. Work is repetitive. Each creative act is unique. Work, while it is not necessarily dehumanizing as in many forms of industrial labour, is still alienating. Creation humanizes nature, imprints the personality of the creator on matter, imposes order and harmony on a divided world. Work isolates. Creation promotes communion through self-expression; it is a celebration. Machines can replace man at the work bench. Creation is typically a human activity. Work produces the clay of life. Creation breathes into it the Spirit.

While work produces the innumerable structures that constantly enslave man, creation breaks out of those structures as constantly. Without the creative activity of man the world would be a drab prison by now. Work provides man's subsistence; creation gives meaning to his life, and makes it worth living. While work repeats the cycle of nature, creation provides the substance of history.

The noblest aspect of the creative spirit in man is the creation of relationships and of community. The deepest creative activity is to love. Here we have the interplay of two freedoms and converging creative movements. There is a dialogue of joy and of discovery. This is perhaps the most challenging type of creation that man is called upon to undertake, imitating, in the process, the creative interplay of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Man is a historical being, not because he lives in history. He does not merely subsist in space and time. The animals do it too. He makes history. His future is what he makes it. Work has a finality; it produces something. Creation is play; it recreates an experience; its purpose is made of the stuff of freedom. While working man *does* something; while creating man simply *is* - himself.

To be oneself, to live, man does not need any special knowledge, nor technique, nor resources. To love, to sing, to dance, to be spontaneous in self-expression, to celebrate is part

of human life. Even the poor have their song and dance, their stories and humour, their celebrations and festivals. They have probably a more ready smile on their lips and find more joy in the simple things of life than their sophisticated rich neighbours who are burdened with mental and emotional problems. Creativity is not only for the elite; it is possible for all. Festivals, holy days and pilgrimages and *rites de passage* bring masses of people together in a common joyful and creative affirmation of life and humanity, of love and fellowship. It is a bourgeois society that has made of art the obscure language of an alienated elite and has imposed on the masses, through the communications media, a mechanized 'democratic' culture.

Making man human is to free him for celebrative affirmation of life; it is to minimize work and to maximize creation or rather creative interaction among peoples. It is in this perspective that we must place the growing dialogue between cultures, religions and peoples. The culmination of this movement of creation cannot be foreseen: it is an object of hope (cf. Rom. 8: 24).

Conclusion

In the past we have been fighting for freedom to create for the individual or for a class. Today we must promote the freedom of all men and every man. The new world cannot be the work of an elite. The masses must be liberated. They will create their world of love and life, of joy and fellowship. Only they can change the world.

Christ is the new man. His is the creative Spirit that brings freedom. "God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children. Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people" (Rom. 8: 16-17). It is our ministry to announce this good news (1 Pet. 2: 9) and to give account of the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). To make people free to create is our service to the world. That is the way God has chosen to make real his promise of a new heaven and a new earth. "Now I make all things new" (Rev. 21: 5).

People's Movements and Struggles in India

Introduction

The majority of people all over the world are crying for food, clothing and shelter. But more than these they need and demand freedom. The existing socio-political and economic structures are oppressive and dehumanising. Against these, people are asserting their freedom, their rights as human subjects. They want Justice. They want an active participatory role in the process of making decisions which affect their lives.

In India, as in many other countries, a small minority wields power over the masses. This minority has monopoly of the means of production. It controls the socio-political, economic, educational, cultural and religious institutions and uses these institutions to fortify their position and to legitimise the exploitation of the masses.

Even after 31 years of independence we hardly see traces of freedom, socialism, democracy, etc. in the lives of the majority of Indian citizens. Fortunately we can still see these concepts stand printed in the pages of the Constitution. Basic needs of the vast majority of the citizens are not met. Men in power who are supposed to do something about it hide their deep determination to maintain the *status quo* behind a mask of superficial change. Their survival - instinct forces them to throw a few crumbs now and then to the masses.

When will our people stop putting their faith in empty promises and awaken to the reality? To see the great gap between what is promised and what is actually given, to understand the mechanism of systematic oppression and dehumanization. To expose the selfishness and hypocrisy of the elite and the so-called leaders. The crumbs thrown to the masses - from war against illiteracy to reservation of seats for Harijans - are meant to fatten the fortunes of the Bureaucracy and of those

in Power. The inadequate resources set aside are cleverly diverted to the personal gain of a few or used to divide the masses further. The masses are duped at every level.

Law books are packed tight with legislations for social and economic reform. But the elite have effective ways of rendering them innocuous. The formal exercise of power is the privilege of the politicians and public officials, but in reality the elite with the means of production sees to it that power is exercised only to preserve and strengthen their class interest. Thus in spite of the so-called progressive policies of the government, the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few goes on increasing while the plight of the masses deteriorate. Caste discrimination, superstitious religious beliefs and practices with the attached socio-religious and supernatural sanctions further ensure the continuity of economic exploitation and cultural oppression.

Unequal opportunities, unjust relations; amassed wealth and political power and monopoly of culture and education in the hands of the elite; poverty and a culture of silence for the millions. This is the *status quo*. How long will it last ?

It is in this context of oppression and dehumanization that we should look at examples of people's initiatives and struggles to break the chains of oppression. The culture of silence giving way to the cry of revolution, announcing the change of structures. The masses giving expression to their locked up feelings and asserting their rights as subjects, as makers of history by saying No to a life of total prescription. Below we have the description of a struggle offered by one of poorest sections of workers in Belgaum with the help of their friends to change an oppressive system.

The struggle of the powerloom workers of Belgaum

The background

Khasbag, Wadgaon, Madavnagar and Shahapur areas of Belgaum town house not less than 5000 powerlooms. Over 8000 people work for this flourishing industry. The looms are owned

by a group of well-to-do individuals, who are organized under the name "The Belgaum Powerloom Owners and Twisters Association" to protect their interests. In the past the government of Karnataka had included this industry under the purview of the Factory Act. But later the government excluded it from the purview of that Act. Why? An example of the government, the bureaucracy and the elite, deeply rooted in capitalistic values of individualism, inhuman competition and profit at any cost, joining hands against the basic interest of the workers? The owners used the situation and developed effective ways of exploiting the workers.

To start with, powerloom workers of Belgaum were not even recognized as workers. They were not given any official appointment. There was no record of their years of service. The workers could be sent away and replaced by others at the whim and fancy of the owner. The "trouble makers" could easily be got rid of. The militant workers were humiliated and taught a lesson by having their heads shaven and paraded in the streets. There was nothing strange in it, nor was it a rare occurrence, when an owner told a person working for him for years that he was not employed by him. Of course there were no records and so no legal way of protecting one's job and years of service. The workers knew deep within their hearts, that the legal system and the police force are used primarily to silence the legitimate protests of the masses. The workers had to be grateful to their benefactors! Were they not given employment when hundreds of others were not and were struggling to get employed?

The powerloom workers had to work overtime if the owner so demanded. But the worker had no right to overtime wages. The earning of a weaver varied from Rs. 120 to Rs. 150 a month. Women and children who did not weave but did related works like filling the bobbin, and winding thread etc. earned much less. The workers were at the mercy of the owners of the machine and of the Electricity Board. They had no guarantee of getting work everyday. If the owner so wished, he could tell the workers that there was no work for the next few days and so no pay too. If the machine went out of order the weaver had no work

and no pay till it was repaired. If there was failure of current, the fate was the same. Workers enjoyed neither paid holidays nor paid leave. They were not given any bonus.

Paralysing factors

There were two trade unions for these workers. A large number of workers were registered members of one or the other union. But institutions meant to safe guard the socio-political and economic interests of the masses are often tools of manipulation in the hands of politicians and vested interests. These party-based unions were no exceptions. They were not interested in protecting the workers and their interests. They were interested in workers votes!

The workers were divided among themselves on the basis of political affiliations, caste and religion. Religions preach love, justice and universal brotherhood, but in practice they encourage people to hate and kill, to erect barriers between man and man, and protect the interests of the elites by drugging the masses with its doctrines of karma, other-worldly reward, non-violence, sin and supernatural sanctions. Workers are encouraged to accept the *status quo* as their fate, their instinct to fight is weakened; they are emasculated and reduced to the level of objects. Did the workers think about these oppressive factors? Anyway, the loom workers of Belgaum were not in a mood to fight. They were too weak as individuals; they had no hope of coming together, of fighting together, of establishing their identity as workers. The long history of oppression and divisive forces had deprived them of the will to struggle and the ability to react as subjects to situations of violence and of inhumanity; it had reduced most of them to silent sufferers.

A ray of hope

But then, as it used to happen on a number of occasions earlier, the fire of anger and frustration that lay buried in the heart of these workers was fanned to a small but visible flame when a group of 70 workers in one of the factories decided to go on a strike on 14th November 1977. As usual the workers were threatened. The forces of oppression and exploitation at the local level joined hands. Legal system came in to protect the

interests of the 'haves'. The strike was declared illegal. The workers had not given prior notice! They could now be thrown out and replaced by others, at least the leaders could be victimised. Oppression began to base its teeth. The workers became panicky. What next? How to save their face?

The BGVM

Some of these workers had come to know earlier a group of young men and women in Belgaum. They were different from other young men and women whom they knew. These young people used to come together to study social problems. Some of them had been to the places where the loom workers live and had even conducted regular study classes for workers analysing with them society and its operational values in contrast to the values it preaches. They had listened to workers problems and shown sympathy and were ready to help, provided the workers were ready to assert their rights. This group was known as the Belgaum Gram Vikas Mandal (BGVM).

The members of BGVM were known for their commitment to people. They had opened their eyes to the reality around them, and seen the poverty and oppression their less fortunate brothers and sisters had to put up with daily. They felt angry and deeply hurt about the way people were treated. Their readiness to pay the price for trying to bring about a new mode of being, a new society which takes seriously the cherished human ideals of love, justice and universal brotherhood, revealed to them the functioning of the present day society in its nakedness.

They discovered that the politicians, the socio-economic and religious elites pose as nation builders, protectors of cultural heritage and defenders of ethical principles. But all that is rhetoric. The principles are used as a cover and a tool to cheat and oppress the masses. Members of BGVM also discovered that there is no hope of change through the present educational system which is elitist, is meant to buttress the system of unequal opportunities and ruthless exploitation, to perpetuate and legitimise landlordism, casteism and capitalistic values and preoccupations. The members of BGVM had absolutely no hope

in the *status quo*. They rejected the capitalistic ideology. Their ambition was to build a new society by building up unity and power among the powerless masses. They were analytical, were observant and took note of facts, and sought to find the deeper realities beneath appearances. People in Belgaum had seen them active in Belgaum city and in the villages around.

A small victory

In their predicament, the powerloom workers who had dared to go on strike now approached the members of BGVM, and got a sympathetic hearing. They were shown that their strike was not illegal. They were not bound to follow the provisions of the Factory Act which excluded them from its purview. They were not obliged to give prior strike notice since their work did not have legal protection. Besides their demands were minimal and just.

The members of BGVM joined the workers in their strike and march, and promised support and guidance as long as the workers wanted it, provided the workers themselves were determined to stand together and fight for their cause. With educated outsiders supporting the workers cause and the workers united, it was not easy for the management to bluff the workers and silence them by using legal jargon and police threat. As a result of this on the 5th day of the struggle (19th Nov. '77) the owner concerned agreed to workers demands. This group of workers celebrated their victory that evening and made it public by having procession through the powerloom areas. The next morning they reported for work with joy and enthusiasm.

A chain reaction

This struggle and its success triggered off a chain reaction, the way BGVM had expected it to happen. There is no better way of organizing and educating the oppressed masses than by showing them that the enemy is no longer invulnerable. Success in one case created the hope of success in all similar situations. The next few days BGVM intensified its work among the workers. BGVM wanted to make the maximum use of this opportunity to bring together 8000 or more powerloom workers of Belgaum. Meetings at street corners were conducted day after

day to make known to the workers the significance of what had happened and to expose systematically the exploitation that went on in the powerloom industry. A learning process had begun both for the members of BGVM and for the workers. It was not learning in abstract, it was a process of becoming critically aware and for many workers it was a way of giving expression to their locked up feelings and to what they already knew. It was a reflection process with determination to act in order to change the status quo. From 23rd November, one after another, factories wanted to go on strike, with the same demands and under the same leadership and guidance of BGVM.

BGVM's task

Now BGVM had to face the challenge. It had the task of educating the workers, of conscientizing them. The workers had to be made aware of their problems, their strengths and weaknesses, the factors that divided them, the strengths and weaknesses of the owners association and the strength of the latter's money and influence with other power structures. They had to be made conscious of the culture of silence in which they lived. They needed to be given an insight into how the government, the law and order system and the police force in the country worked, an insight into the class interest of the public administrative servants, the powers and limitations of people like the Deputy Commissioner, Labour Commissioner, etc. BGVM had to create hope of success, create confidence, had to convince the workers that their sole strength was their unity, co-operation and determination to struggle till they win. The struggle had to get public sympathy, sympathy from other unions and organizations. BGVM had to impress upon the workers how any form of violence would defeat their cause in the given situation. BGVM had to find an effective way of conducting a school of non formal education, issue focused learning through the methodology of action - reflection (praxis). More than all these BGVM had to establish its identity as a new group, with a new ideology to fight for getting power for the powerless, voice for the voiceless victims of the culture of silence, justice for the exploited.

BGVM's identity

In so many small ways BGVM proved to the workers that they as a group and as individuals did not care for the status quo. Every action of the BGVM from the very beginning of the struggle proved to the workers that persons involved in it were neither after power, money, career, nor after propagating any sectarian interest.

Members of BGVM saw oppression and exploitation no longer as a by-product, a chance occurrence. They saw how the forces of oppression and dehumanization at local, national and international levels were strongly organized with monstrous power. In contrast they saw how the forces of liberation were divided and torn apart by narrow loyalties to certain socio-cultural, political, religious and other sectarian considerations. BGVM consisted of a mixed assortment of people. There were in it Marathi speaking and Kannada speaking people. There was a jesuit priest and a jesuit brother. There were brahmins and lingayats and other caste people. What united them was a common ideology to fight capitalism, and sectarian interests that oppressed the masses and the desire to work for an egalitarian society.

Hence they openly told the workers to beat with slippers anyone who would use his involvement with workers to ask worker's vote for this party or that, to convert workers to christianity, to build up personal prestige and career, or to promote any sectarianism. BGVM's one and only identity was its commitment to the cause of justice for the exploited, to be voice for those loving the culture of silence, right of self-determination to those living a life of total prescription, power to the masses to do away with oppressive socio-economic and politico-cultural systems.

The struggle intensified

As a result of the street corner meetings and friendly interaction between the members of BGVM and workers within a fortnight 800 workers belonging to 17 different factories were on the street, on strike. BGVM would have only those factories, where the workers were united and unanimous in deciding to

struggle, to go on strike. The period of strike BGVM explained to the workers, was the schooling period for the workers. The workers on strike gathered everyday during the working hours in front of their factory below their red flag to learn. They learnt about the society in which they lived, its value system and the role they played in it. In the evenings workers on strike and those who returned from work gathered in bigger numbers for this non-formal learning session. Initially one or the other member of BGVM analysed for the workers how the elite and the institutions, meant to safe-guard the workers interest, were exploiting them. Later on the more enlightened workers themselves took initiative to explain the mechanisms of oppression to their co-workers.

Birth of a worker's union

The struggle of the 800 workers continued. There were a few abortive attempts at reconciliation. But soon the owners refused to negotiate with BGVM and the worker's representatives on the ground that they were not a recognized trade union. Because of this many of the workers felt that they had to form a new union. BGVM saw the point. So steps were taken to get a new union registered under the name "Shramik Shakti Sanghatana". Members were enrolled, office-bearers elected, constitution and by-laws framed, and all the necessary papers for registration sent to Hubli.

A living experience of brotherhood

The powerloom workers were one of the poorest sections of workers in Belgaum. 800 of them were already on strike, many more wanted to come out on strike. How long could the strike last? How could the families of the poorest of workers save themselves from starvation? These problems worried the leaders. By now most of the factories had formed committees and elected their own leaders. BGVM and the workers leaders sat together and arrived at certain decisions: No more workers should be coming out on strike. Committees set up in each of the 17 factories on strike should study the economic condition of the strikers. The poorest among them should be helped.

Neither BGVM nor the workers had to beg for help. Sympathizers, rich and poor were giving what they could to see that the workers' struggle continued till their demands were met. Contributions in cash and kind came in from varied directions. Now even the poorest of workers had not to fear starvation. They could at least have one meal a day. The workers who were not on strike supported the ones on strike, those who were slightly better off came to the aid of the badly off. The members of BGVM reaffirmed their solidarity with the workers and their readiness to suffer for the workers cause by sharing the hardships of the workers. This was an unique experience for all; the workers and BGVM members had by now learned the true meaning of brotherhood.

Trail of strength

On 22nd December, the owners declared lock-out for the whole industry. The lock-out, anybody could see, was an attempt to break the worker's unity. The owners thought that the victims of the lock-out would turn against the strike. But they were disappointed. Their tactic "boomeranged". The workers saw through their wicked tactics and decided that those on strike and the victims of the lock-out should work hand-in-hand and fight tooth and nail.

The victims of the lock-out had committed no crime, placed no demands, had not gone on strike, were reporting regularly on duty, and yet were made jobless, thousands of them. BGVM had to guide and organise these workers too now. With the workers' unanimous consent all marched to the Deputy Commissioner's office. They decided to squat at the D. C.'s office day and night till the lock-out was lifted. Five to six hundred people, men and women with sucklings sat day and night for 15 days at the D. C.'s office, calm and peaceful, demanding jobs for 7000 workers rendered jobless over night. They were a force! The winter nights were cold but the fire burning in their bellies and the warmth of brotherly concern kept the struggle going. The street-corner meetings still continued. In this non-formal situation workers seemed to be learning fast, learning things that mattered to them most, through

the methodology of action-reflection. Now the venue for public meeting was the D. C.'s compound.

Attempts at reconciliation by the D. C. on 23rd December again failed. Women workers gheraoed the D.C. and insisted on a speedy solution. D.C. referred the matter to Bangalore. And on January 7th there was an order from Bangalore banning the lock-out. The workers were jubilant. Victims of the lock-out went back to work. But those on strike continued the struggle. But soon another order followed that banned the strike too. The case of the powerloom workers was now before the Labour Court for decision. But the workers could not afford to wait for the decision of the Labour Court. So they continued the strike. The leaders were now threatened by the police and were requested again and again to call off the 'illegal' strike.

On 10th January "Shramik Shakti Sanghataa" was officially registered. On 18th January a group of workers decided to celebrate the 50th day of the struggle, in a peaceful and reflective manner. On the same day the owners too were having a meeting in a near-by temple. During the meeting some goondas of the owners burned the workers' red flag. In the confusion one of the scooters parked near by was set on fire by someone. This was enough to accuse the workers of violence. The police lathi-charged and arrested the workers, their leaders and a number of BGVM members who were actively helping out in the struggle. Altogether 54 people were arrested and carted off to the jail, there was only one cry to be heard from the workers united in their thousands, "Shramik Shakti Zindabad!" In a public meeting that followed the arrest and lathi-charge, workers unanimously decided to continue the struggle.

Victory

The owners began to see that nothing could break the workers' struggle. They began searching for ways of reconciliation. By 25th January some possibility of settlement was seen. So two of the jailed BGVM members came out on bail. On 29-30th January after a long session lasting from 5 p. m. to 2. 30 a. m., an agreement was reached in which practically all the demands of the workers were met. On 30th January all the

arrested people were released on bail. On 2nd February at another meeting with the owners another agreement was signed stating that the agreement signed on 29th January would be binding on all the members of the Belgaum Powerloom and Twisters Association and the members of the Shramik Shakti Sanghatana. Thus ended the seventy-day-old struggle of the workers.

Conclusion

It is now one year since the struggle ended. There are cases against all those who were arrested and their hearing has begun. Though agreements were signed the owners were not eager to abide by all the provisions of the agreement. So, on and off during the last year, workers had to agitate to get their demands.

The struggle has not changed the economic condition of the workers very much. But as a result of the struggle their human condition has changed remarkably. Today they are no more a group of silent sufferers. They no longer live the culture of silence. They have gained courage to challenge the oppressive system and face the consequences. They know that though they are poor and ill-clad they are in no way inferior to any other human being. They have a new self image, an ideal to live for. Many of them have given up the habit of drinking. Many are saying no to factors that divide them and make them enemies of one another. They are making an effort to live the values of justice, co-operation, sharing and brotherly concern in their dealings with one another and thus already ushering in the new society. They know the pressure that capitalistic values exert on them and on other well-meaning individuals. Hence they are on their guard. They correct and take to task members of BGVM and the office bearers of Shramik Shakti Sanghatana when they make mistakes.

The workers know how the power structures work. They have some insight into the mechanism used by the elite to oppress them. They have opened their eyes and seen that the kind of oppression they face is the fate of millions of people in India. They know that liberation for them will become fully real

only when the masses in India will have gained enough strength and confidence and have organized themselves to fight against the prevalent oppressive structures. This they know is a very big task and they are willing to contribute their mite towards building a people's movement for liberation.

Shramik Shakti Sanghatana born out of the workers struggle now looks into the grievances of the workers. It was, of course, easier to maintain workers unity and their eagerness to learn during the period of the struggle. BGVM made maximum use of that period to organize and educate the workers. After the struggle during the last one year five large public meetings of workers were organized to make the workers conscious of their oneness and to provide them with new inputs to increase their awareness with regard to the various socio-political and economic issues and the oppressive system as such. Besides these, workers and members of BGVM meet regularly on a non-formal basis for group discussions and study sessions. The power loom workers of Belgaum have now a new vision, a new hope. Number of them now come forward to do the work of motivating and organizing others to fight for their rights and to build a better society for all.

Belgaum

J. Chenakala

Mao and the People

I

There is an ancient Chinese fable called "The Foolish Old Man who Removed the Mountains". It tells of an old man who lived in northern China long, long ago and was known as the Foolish Old Man of North Mountain. His house faced south and beyond his doorway stood the two great peaks, Taihang and Wangwu, obstructing the way. He called his sons, and hoe in hand they began to dig up these mountains with great determination. Another greybeard known as the Wise Old Man, saw them and said decisively, "How silly of you to do this! It is quite impossible for you few to dig up these two huge mountains". The Foolish Old Man replied, "When I die, my son will carry on; when they die, there will be my grandsons, and then their sons and grandsons, and so on to infinity. High as they are, the mountains cannot grow any higher and with every bit we dig, they will be that much lower. Why can't we clear them away?" Having refuted the Wise Old Man's wrong view, he went on digging every day, unshaken in his conviction. God was moved by this, and he sent down two angels, who carried the mountains away on their backs. Mao applies this story to the China of his days; two big mountains like a dead weight lay on the Chinese people, one, imperialism, the other, feudalism. The Chinese Communist Party according to Mao made up its mind to dig them up. It worked hard, worked unceasingly; the glory of the perseverance touched God's heart; and God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people. If they stood together, why couldn't those two mountains be cleared away? ¹

The Party and the masses are the two decisive characters in this story. 'Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people'. This story in a very telling way sums up Chairman Mao's concept of party and the people. The party and the people are inseparable in this whole process of building up a new

1. Mao Tse-Tung's Concluding Speech at the 7th National Congress of Communist Party of China, Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung SW. Vol III Peking 1967, p. 271-273.

China. Mao's faith in the Party and the people merits no comparative study as they are complementary in his great scheme of building up a democratic China. Mao was a great teacher and he placed his trust in the people hoping that the political consciousness of the people could be raised. "We must first raise the political consciousness of the vanguard so that, resolute and unafraid of sacrifice, they will surmount every difficulty to win victory. But this is not enough; we must also arouse the consciousness of the entire people so that they may willingly and gladly fight together with us for ever"².

Mao clarifies whom he has in mind when he uses the word people, "Workers, peasants, urban petit-bourgeois elements, patriotic intellectuals, patriotic capitalists and other patriots together comprise more than ninety-five per cent of the whole country's population. Under our people's democratic dictatorship, all of these come within the classification of the people"³.

II

1. People and ideas

Being a student of Marx, Mao was inspired by Marxist theory of knowledge. Mao was swept away by the discovery of the close connection between people and knowledge. This discovery in fact shaped his concept of people, leadership, revolution and new society. Granules of ideas from the raw and rich experiences of the people are concentrated and taken back to the people. This moulded them and sharpened their perceptiveness. For Mao, ideas were not the result of philosophical speculations. These evolved out of social praxis. Mao was not preaching to the masses knowledge from somewhere out there. In writing on *Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership*, in 1943, Mao explains his position interpreting Marxist Theory of knowledge.

"In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily 'from the masses to the masses'.

2. Ibid.p. 271.

3. Mao Tse-Tung *Unrehearsed, Talks and Letters: 1966-71* Ed. Stuart Schram, Pelican Books 1974, p. 169.

This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and un-systematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. Add so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist Theory of knowledge."⁴

For Mao ideas come from social practice. People through their praxis in society evolve ideas. "Where do correct ideas come from? ... They come from social practice, and from it alone ... It is man's social being that determines his thinking. Once the correct ideas characteristic of the advanced classes are grasped by the masses, these ideas turn into a material force which changes society and changes the world".⁵ Mao elaborates the process by saying that through social practices people gain perceptual knowledge. Accumulation of perceptual knowledge leads to conceptual knowledge. Mao says that it is the first stage in the whole process of cognition, the stage leading from objective matter to subjective consciousness, from existence to ideas⁶. Then comes the second stage in the process of cognition, the stage leading from ideas back to existence in which the knowledge gained in the first stage is applied in social practice. Often correct knowledge can be arrived at only after many repetitions of the process leading from matter to consciousness and then back to matter that is, leading from practices to knowledge and then back to practices. In

4. Some Questions Concerning the Methods of Leadership, 1943 Sw, Vol. III Peking 1967, p. 119.

5. Where do Correct Ideas Come from? Mao Tse - Tung, taken from the draft decision of the Central Committee of the CCP on certain Problems in our present Rural Work, Liberation Vol. I No. 10 (pp.3,4) p. 3

6. Ibid p. 3.

line with this Marxist theory of knowledge Mao insists that it is necessary to educate the comrades so that they can orientate their thinking correctly⁷.

2. The concept of people

"Freedom is won by the people through struggle, it is not bestowed by anyone as a favour."⁸ Mao has quoted Dr. Sun Yat-Sen on this point. After devoting forty long years to the cause of the national revolution with the aim of winning freedom and equality for China, his experience during those forty years firmly convinced him: "to achieve this aim we must arouse the masses of the people and unite in a common fight"⁹.

Mao's esteem of the masses is very well expressed in these words, "It is my wish to go on being a pupil, learning from the masses, together with all other party comrades"¹⁰.

In the context of the Cultural Revolution Mao said, "Every comrade must be helped to understand that as long as we rely on the people, believe firmly in the inexhaustible creative power of the masses and hence trust and identify ourselves with them, we can surmount any difficulty, and no enemy can crush us while we can crush any enemy"¹¹.

Referring to the question of population in his reply to US Secretary of States Dean Acheson's letter in 1949, Mao says, "Of all things in the world, people are the most precious". He was steadfast and firm in his unique realisation that as long as there are people under the leadership of the Communist Party every kind of miracle could be performed¹².

7. Ibid p. 4.

8. On Coalition Government, SW, Vol. III, Peking 1967, p. 243.

9. Ibid P. 243.

10. Preface and postscript to Rural Surveys, SW, Vol. III, 1967, p. 13.

11. "Trust the Masses. Rely on the Masses", Editorial of Red Flag, Liberation, Vol. 1 No. 12, pp. 66-70.

12. Bankruptcy of Idealist Conception of History, SW, 1969, Vol. IV, p. 454.

Mao adds a lot to his concept of people when he establishes that people are the decisive factor even during war, and not weapons. Weapons were important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it was people, not things, that were decisive. The contest of strength was not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale. Military and economic power was necessarily wielded by people¹³.

3. Party and the masses

Mao's sayings would appear inconsistent and even confusing on the relation between party and the people. As some of the readings here show, party is supreme in his thinking. But on certain other occasions, we see Mao placing all his trust on the masses.

Analysing the classes in Chinese society, Mao Tse-Tung says, "A revolutionary party is the guide of the masses, and no revolution ever succeeds when the revolutionary party leads them astray" ¹⁴. Mao makes clear the relation between the party and the masses here. Mao gives great importance to people as we have noted already. But ultimately for Mao it is the party that is able to provide the leadership to the masses. Mao does not attribute any virtue to the masses simply because they are the masses. It is in the combination of the party and the masses that Mao sees the revolutionary potential.

In the same trend speaking about the well-being of the masses Mao said in 1934, "We are the leaders and organizers of the revolutionary war as well as the leaders and organizers of the life of the masses. To organize the revolutionary war and to improve the life of the masses are our two major tasks."¹⁵

13. On protracted War, SW, vol. II, Peking 1967, p. 143.

14. Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society, SW, Vol. 1 Peking 1967, p. 13

15. Be Concerned with well Being of the Masses, Ibid. p. 150.

During the period of party's resistance to Japan in 1937, Mao discussed the question of the relation between party and the masses. Here in line with Lenin's position Mao is placing party and the cadres on top.".... we must also regard it our duty to discover many more new cadres and leaders in the party and the country. Our revolution depends on cadres. As Stalin said, 'Cadres decide everything'.¹⁶

In spite of this, the trend seems to slide in favour of the masses in his later writings. We come across passages like this, "We must have a correct policy. The fundamental point of our policy is boldly to mobilize the masses and expand the people's forces so that, under the leadership of our party, they will defeat the aggressors and build a new China".¹⁷

In the address to the cadres at the Shansi-Suiyuan Liberated Area in April 1948, Mao found fault with a conference of secretaries of prefectural parties when they raised the sweeping slogan, "Do everything as the masses want it". He accused them for failing to make a sober analysis. With respect to the point raised, i. e., the question of the party's relationship with the masses Mao said that the party must lead the masses to carry out all their correct ideas in the light of the circumstances and educate them to correct any wrong ideas they may entertain.¹⁸

Taking up the matter with the editorial staff of the Shansi-Suiyuan Daily, Mao finds fault with the attitude of some people in the party set up that it is enough for the leaders to know the party's policies and that there is no need to let the masses know them. Mao attributes the failures to this defective understanding and approach. "We have always maintained that the revolution must rely on the masses of the people, on everybody's taking a hand, and have opposed relying merely on a few

16. The Question of Cadres, Ibid, p. 291.

17. China's Two possible Destinies, SW, Vol. III. Peking 1967, p. 202.

18. Speech and the Conference of Cadres, SW, Vol. IV, Peking 1969 p. 232.

persons issuing orders".¹⁹ Mao suggests ideological education on the mass line to meet the problems involved in this.

The need for the party to keep pace with the masses is explained in the following statement.

"If we tried to go on the offensive when the masses are not yet awakened, that would be adventurism If we did not advance when the masses demand advance, that would be right opportunism."²⁰

Writing in 1943 about methods of leadership Mao is still unrelenting in his view that correct ideas on the part of the leadership can only be "from the masses to the masses". He wanted this to be propagated everywhere to correct the mistaken viewpoints among cadres on the question. He accuses comrades for not drawing together activists to form a nucleus of leadership and link the leadership with the masses²¹. In order to form correct ideas of leadership Mao would prescribe the basic method of leadership, i. e. "Take the ideas of the masses and concentrate them, then go to the masses, persevere in the ideas and carry them through".²²

While distinguishing the party style and the Kuomintang style, Mao affirms that the Communist Party style is to have close link with the masses, learn from them and whole-heartedly serve the people and just as we wash our faces or sweep the floor everyday, to undertake self-criticism of our own shortcomings and mistakes²³. In such passages we note the attempt on the part of Chairman Mao to bring the masses and the cadres closer and closer.

In February 1967, Mao explicitly repudiated those ultra-leftists within China who imagined that the masses, under the

19. A talk to the Editorial Staff of the Shansi-Suiyuan Daily; Ibid, PP. 241 f.

20. Ibid p. 243.

21. Concerning Methods of Leadership. SW, Vol. III Peking 1967, p. 119.

22. Ibid p. 120.

23. "From the Masses to the Masses," Editorial of People's Daily, July 21, 1966, Liberation Vol. I No. 12, PP. 71-74.

guidance of correct ideology, could do without leadership. Noting that the Shanghai People's Committee had demanded the abolition of heads, Mao remarked: "This is extreme anarchism, it is most reactionary. If instead of calling someone the 'head' of something we call him 'orderly' or 'assistant' this would really be only a formal change. In reality there will still always be 'heads'".²⁴

Mao's thinking on this point took more definite form along the lines of Leninist concept of the relation between the leaders and the masses. Reiterating this position in 1969 at the First Plenum of the New Central Committee elected at the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao said, "You are communists, you are that part of the masses which is more conscious, you are that part of the proletariat which is more conscious"²⁵. Mao affirmed that Party is the decisive leadership organization, the locus of consciousness and authority in society.²⁶

But we have also observed how keen Mao was in minimizing the gap between the cadres and the masses.

4. Democratic centralism

For Mao, the central problem is that of combining effective leadership with broad participation in order to achieve a radical transformation of society. He makes use of the concept of "democratic centralism" to explain his position. Taking the concept from Lenin, Mao brings his own insights and original thinking into it. Lenin coined the term "democratic centralism" to define the proper functioning of the Communist Party itself. Mao though he uses the term in discussing the party, employs it much more broadly to characterize the spirit of Chinese society as a whole, and the relation between the leadership and the masses.

Though Mao is by no means free of Leninist elitism, he is to a far greater extent ready to trust the masses and to involve them actively in shaping their own destiny. As we have already noticed, Mao had to face problems especially during

24. Ed. Stuart Schram, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

25. *Ibid.* p. 288.

26. *Ibid.* p. 17

the Cultural Revolution. But this approach is also responsible in the last analysis for the great creative upsurge in China²⁷.

Mao said in 1957, "We must bring about a political climate which has both centralism and democracy, discipline and freedom, unity of purpose and ease of mind for the individual and which is lively and vigorous".²⁸ Mao explains the concept of Democratic Centralism. Without democracy there cannot be any correct centralism because people's ideas differ and if their understanding of things lacks unity then centralism cannot be established. 'Centralism' means centralization of correct ideas, on the basis of which unity of understanding, policy, planning, command and action are achieved. If there is no democracy, if ideas are not coming from the masses, it is impossible to establish a good line, good general and specific policies and methods. If we fail to promote democracy in full measure then centralism will be false, empty and incorrect²⁹.

As Stuart Schram points out the real hallmark of Mao's thinking is the conviction that in the last analysis it is not necessary to choose between democracy and centralism³⁰. Mao keeps a balance between the two. Many allege that at times of crisis as it happened during the Cultural Revolution, Mao would return to the Leninist position that party is the decisive factor. But Mao's life shows that he was ever concerned with this problem. His genuine concern is evidenced by his long fight with the bureaucracy. He attacks vehemently the bureaucracy on the ground that they do not allow the people to speak³¹.

Mao's faith in the people can be witnessed in his stress on democracy. All the same this is not a naive glorification of people. His faith in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism stands over against his faith in the people. These should go side by side. He had his vision of educating the masses along ideological lines. "... So long as we can grasp the science of Marxism-Leninism, have confidence in the masses, stand closely together

27. Ibid. p. 11.

28. Ibid. p. 163.

29. Ibid. p. 164.

30. Ibid. p. 13.

31. Ibid. p. 167

with the masses and lead them forward, we shall be fully able to surmount any obstacle and overcome any difficulty.³²” Mao was a great teacher. Talking to Edgar Snow, in December 1970, Mao Tse-Tung said that he wished to be remembered only as a teacher. A people ideologically committed, was his vision. From that perspective, the place given in his philosophy to the party which is the sole-agent of the ideology needs no apology.

5. People and culture

Mao was deeply involved in the culture of the people and his educational policy was formulated in the full awareness of the cultural patterns of the people.

Speaking about the people of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Boarder Region, Mao says that although the culture of the liberated area has a progressive side, the broad masses are still under the influence of superstition. He says there are enemies inside the minds of the people. The masses have to be alerted to rise in struggle against their own illiteracy, superstitions and unhygienic habits. For this a broad united front is indispensable. Especially in the context of their fighting with Japan, the educational system should combine regular primary and secondary schools, and scattered irregular village schools, newspaper-reading groups and literacy classes. The old style village schools can also be used. In arts Mao advocated not only modern drama, but also the Shensu Opera and the Yanko dance. In the field of medicine Mao promoted the indigenous doctors along with modern doctors. He said, “Our task is to unite with all intellectuals, artists and doctors of the old type who can be useful, to help them, convert them and transform them. In order to transform them, we must first unite with them³³”.

Mao says that the Chinese culture is a people's culture. The cultural workers must act in accordance with the needs

32. Present Situation and Our Tasks, SW Vol. IV Peking 1969, p. 173.

33. The Speech made at a Conference of Cultural and Educational Workers of Shensi kansu- Ningsia Border Region, SW Vol. III Peking 1967, p. 186.

and wishes of the masses. All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the imagination of any individual however well-intentioned. In the cultural and educational work which aims at transforming the thinking of the masses, Mao advocates two principles, "one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need" and "the other is the wishes of the masses who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them"³⁴.

Mao here lays great stress on the cultural workers that they must link themselves with the masses and not divorce themselves from the masses. To do this they must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses.

III

Chairman Mao-Tse-Tung has made substantial contribution to people's revolution for liberation. However much we hear of de-Maoification in the post-Mao era in the People's Republic of China, there is no denying the fact that he is the architect of the New China. The great contribution he has made to world history and especially to the exploited and oppressed masses of the Third world is his concept of People. The new concept of people and the foretaste of resurrection of the masses in the Asian countries, we owe to Mao Tse-Tung. There are various factors involved in this phenomenon.

1. Mao took Chinese society and people seriously. With all his reverence for Marxism-Leninism he would not simply transplant that to China. He adapted the Marxist ideology to the Chinese situation formulating the Marxist-Leninist ideas in the Chinese context. Mao discovered that the concept of proletariat as industrial workers is unrealistic and inadequate in the Chinese context. He broadened the concept to embrace the peasants whom he recognized as potential makers of a New China. Mao was always conscious of the large masses of the Chinese people in their illiteracy, superstition and disease-stricken state.

2. Mao's trust in the Masses. That in a country of such size with problems of such magnitude so much emphasis could

34, Ibid p. 187.

be attached to the masses is remarkable. It goes to the credit of Mao. His emphasis on democracy helped to mobilize the masses. Mao knows Marx too well at this point, "The proletariat must emancipate not only itself but all mankind".³⁵ It was Mao who really illustrated Marx's faith in the people even beyond Marx at this point. It was Mao's undying faith in the people that enabled him to build the New China.

3. Emphasis on Culture and Education. Mao's trust in the people could be annotated by his focus on education in the cultural context of the people. Being a teacher he believed that the people could be educated to formulate correct ideas and hold on to them.

4. Commitment to ideology. Mao knew what would change the face of the Chinese society and the people: Marxism-Leninism. So he wanted the cadres to equip themselves with the ideology and help the people to live it. His concept of people was born of his understanding of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and of the Chinese society. So he could discern the signs of the times. When Mao speaks about people it is not simply as a collection of alienated individuals but masses who are the potential class that should throw away the imperialist and feudal forces. The people Mao sees as the exploited and oppressed masses who with their proper understanding of the class character of the society would commit itself at any cost to throw away the oppressive forces. That accounts for Mao's oft-quoted dictum; the masses and the Communist Party together would crush all enemies.

People by themselves will not become the masters of history. To hold them together to enable them to fight the forces of domination and become the subject of their own history, people have to get arrayed behind an ideology or faith. Mao found the ideology of Marxism-Leninism powerful enough to provide the content for an adequate concept of people and philosophy for the birth of a new society. Mao proved that the Communist party of China could provide an ideology which could hold the people together in their march towards a socialist society. The people became the subject of history once they were equipped with the ideology that could sustain them.

Tiruvalla

M. J. Joseph

35. Ed. Stuart Schram, op. cit., p. 261.

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